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More sovereign debt, less sovereignty

Mike Wevers

Attention to political events usually wanes over the summer while people focus on what is important in their personal lives: family, summer vacation, and time to relax. Not so for the American people this summer, who faced the prospect of their nation going into default as they came to grips with a new facet of their political life – sovereign debt.

When other countries hold your [national] debt, your sovereignty may be constrained by foreign governments.

Governments need to borrow, just like you and me

Sovereign debt is the money governments owe for having incurred deficits. And deficits are incurred when governments spend more money in a fiscal year than they collect in revenue. This is not unlike any individual household. We often spend more money than we earn, either by using our credit cards or going to the bank to borrow money. At some stage, our bankers would like to make sure we have a plan to pay off the debt because they want their money back. Such plans usually limit our flexibility, as debt repayment becomes a priority.

Similarly, nation-states face constraints when running up their



Republicans wouldn't accept President Obama's "Grand Bargain" during the debt ceiling debate.

sovereign debt, eventually needing to stop its growth and begin to pay it back. When other countries hold

your debt, your sovereignty may be constrained by foreign governments. You may have to witness

your Secretary of State contact Chinese bondholders to assure them that all is in control, or watch your European neighbours dictate to your Greek parliament how to run your country!

No summer doldrums in Washington

The back room storms unleashed in Washington during the battle to lift the country's debt ceiling reminded me of the political and public confrontations in Alberta when difficult fiscal plans were being developed. Because the United States government is spending more each month than it receives in revenue, it needs to borrow money (by selling Treasury bonds) regularly to enable its

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The case for supply management farming

Nathan Stevens

Some things are as perennial as the grass. One of these is an annual issuing of magazine commentaries from urban-based columnists criticizing the marketing systems for certain Canadian farm products. Such was the case with a recent column in *Maclean's* magazine by Andrew Coyne questioning the fairness of some of Canada's regulated approaches to farm product marketing.

Canada uses a system called "supply management" to control the supply of dairy and poultry products. The system features controls on production, pricing



Supply management farming controls the amount of milk produced in Canada.

arrangements and protection from cheaper foreign imports. Coyne is not a fan of the system, issuing a number of broadsides regarding its fairness, cost and social benefit.

Coyne doesn't take into account, however, that Canadian farmers have adopted supply management for very sound reasons. I'll highlight some of these reasons as I address some of Coyne's criticisms.

Coyne questions why we should have one set of rules for some farms, and another for the rest. I would ask if having different sets of rules for different situations is really so strange? Agriculture is not monolithic in approach, any

more than in other industries. In the non-agricultural world, we see unionized and non-unionized workforces. Each option has both opportunities and limitations that must be accepted. It is similar in agriculture.

Opportunities and limitations

Supply-managed farmers have accepted limitations on their opportunities by choosing to only produce for the domestic market. If milk and milk product consumption in Canada goes up, new quota is made available. If demand goes

See **Farming** on page 2

News

Debt *continued*

overspending. Problem was that the Obama administration was about to reach the legislated debt limit approved by Congress. It would take an act of Congress to increase this limit, but the House of Representatives' Republican majority would not accept Obama's "Grand Bargain."

Obama's plan included cuts in social security "entitlement" programs, long a target of the Grand Old Party, but packaged with tax increases on the wealthy. House Speaker John Boehner did not find this bargain so grand, resisting any deficit reduction package which included tax increases. To avoid the embarrassment of default, the Obama administration lost the battle, accepting immediate budget cuts and no tax increases to get the debt ceiling raised. There is also a bipartisan commitment to work on further budget adjustments, which may or may not include tax increases. Republicans, fuelled by the Tea Party, may continue to resist tax increases on the wealthy, even though one of the richest men in America, Warren Buffet, believes these should happen.

With the August agreement and a subsequent debt issue, the United States public debt rose to \$14.3 trillion or a little higher than 100 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The US has not seen this high a debt to GDP ratio since the end of World War II. But in 1945, with peace at hand and the boomers' parents forging an unprecedented period of economic growth, that ratio soon diminished. Now the US is mired in two mid-east conflicts, and aging boomers are expecting more from government. Given the resultant increasing military and social security spending, and the ongoing



political divide in America, it is no surprise that Standard and Poor downgraded the US credit worthiness.

European economic disarray

The debt ceiling battle in the United States was backdropped by ongoing anxiety over Europe's challenges. The European Union has to deal with one battered economy in Greece, and others that appear on the brink of a US-style downgrade. On Sept. 7, Germany's highest court made way for its government to bail out Greece. Greek street protests have underlined the drastic budget reductions its government has had to take to appease worried bondholders. Not wishing to join the sorry state of affairs in Greece, other European countries, including France,

Italy and Spain, have introduced austerity programs to limit their debt exposure.

Canada shows the way

The Canadian government has followed a tight fiscal management strategy for a number of years. In 1995, the then-Liberal government introduced Finance Minister Paul Martin's austerity plan following a downgrade of Canada's credit worthiness. It followed a 7 to 1 ratio of \$7 in budget cuts for every \$1 increase in taxes. Within a decade, Canada had regained its triple-A credit rating. The Harper government has maintained Canada's fiscal health. Although it incurred deficits to provide economic stimulus in response to the recession following the world's financial system crisis, it is still on course to decrease the accumulated debt to GDP ratio to about 30 percent by 2016.

Alberta's tight fiscal management has seen it debt free

Most of my career with the Alberta Government was spent serving as an advisor to its Treasury Board, which is responsible for determining the budget priorities for the province. In July 2004, Alberta declared itself debt free after eliminating \$22.7 billion in accumulated debt. It is easy to say Alberta could pay off its debt because of its vast resource wealth. This ignores two factors. Notwithstanding all that resource wealth, Alberta incurs deficits when oil and gas prices plummet. Secondly, Alberta has no sales tax. If in other jurisdictions sales tax revenue supplants Alberta's gas and oil revenues, why have they not been able to eliminate debt using that revenue? The

answer remains that regardless of revenue sources, it still takes sound fiscal management to tackle deficits and debt.

Are the storms behind us?

Hurricane Irene smashed through the northeastern United States at summer's end. Although the storm's devastation was not as great as had been anticipated, it did wreak havoc in many areas. A summer which witnessed so much political turmoil will give way to a fall where the chill of political confrontation will envelope America's political discourse. Political adversaries became more entrenched as the American government moved to the brink of financial default. The debt ceiling deal ensured that the need for any further increase has been put off until 2013, after the next presidential election, but the details of the agreed-upon budget adjustments must still be hammered out. The battle over cuts vs. tax increases will be reengaged. That fight may indeed make Hurricane Irene look like a mild summer storm.

President Obama made the first move in early September with a new stimulus package to create jobs for a listless American economy. The Republicans will not pay for it by increasing taxes. The real political battle – for the 2012 American Presidency – will begin in earnest. It seems that the biggest political storms are just forming. ➤

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton.

**Farming** *continued*

down, which it has, production goes down to match. In return for accepting this limitation, farmers are granted protection from foreign dumping and receive bargaining power when determining price. This is extremely important when dealing with a product that has a limited shelf life and sees new supply produced daily.

Non-supply managed farmers deal with the boom and bust of commodity price cycles. There are good years and bad years, and in the bad years these farmers usually draw on government dollars for support. These farmers are vulnerable to the vagaries of international commodity prices. The upside is that there are times of great opportunity to expand and engage in very profitable business. The downside is that the more export reliant these industries are, the greater the crash when something goes wrong like the BSE crisis (often referred to as "mad cow disease") that affected beef and sheep producers.

Coyne also asserts that supply management has led to higher prices, fewer farms, less product innovation, and general inefficiency up and down the supply chain. While these statements may be accurate in

and of themselves, the connections between them are more complex and less straightforward than his article makes them appear.

Let's start with fewer farms and innovation on the farm. The progression to fewer farms is one that has been taking place since man decided that living in urban areas and specializing in an activity that wasn't subsistence food production was a good idea. This process was hastened with the domestication of work animals like horses and oxen, progressing to tractors and now enveloping all the advances science has made in both cropping and animal production. The net result in the proliferation of technology is that a single farmer can handle far more than his predecessors. That supply-managed farms have consolidated is an indication that innovation, technology adaptation and a focus on efficiency are in fact strong drivers in the industry.

Higher prices in context

Higher prices are a product of having bargaining power in the marketplace. Supply-managed farms have been able to demand that their prices rise as the cost of production rises. Average consumers

[Supply management farming] is simply a fair approach to dealing with other players when your product, like milk or eggs, is perishable. In a "free market" arrangement, these farmers face the threat of becoming price-takers, rather than negotiators.

are aware of the impact of rising energy prices and probably less aware of much higher prices for grains. This is simply a fair approach to dealing with other players when your product, like milk or eggs, is perishable. In a "free market" arrangement, these farmers face the threat of becoming price-takers, rather than negotiators.

Finally, regarding trade, critics of supply management need to remember that nearly all countries have something that they

choose to provide special protection for regardless of any outside factor. Japan has rice production. America has the big five grains that receive tremendous support. Europe has shifted how it provides support, but there is still plenty available to farmers that are willing to engage in new environmental programming. Even in free market dairy regions like Australia, supply control is exerted by forcing farmers to own shares in processors in order to be allowed to ship their product anywhere at all.

As always, the full story of life on the farm is more complicated than urban columnists make it out to be. The adoption and usage of supply management systems for agricultural products is just one of those complicated subjects. In contrast to Coyne, I believe that the systems are fair to both farmers and consumers when the issue is approached with a broad and realistic perspective. ➤

Nathan Stevens is the Research and Policy Advisor for the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. The CFFO represents 4,200 farming families across the province.



News

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Big and small



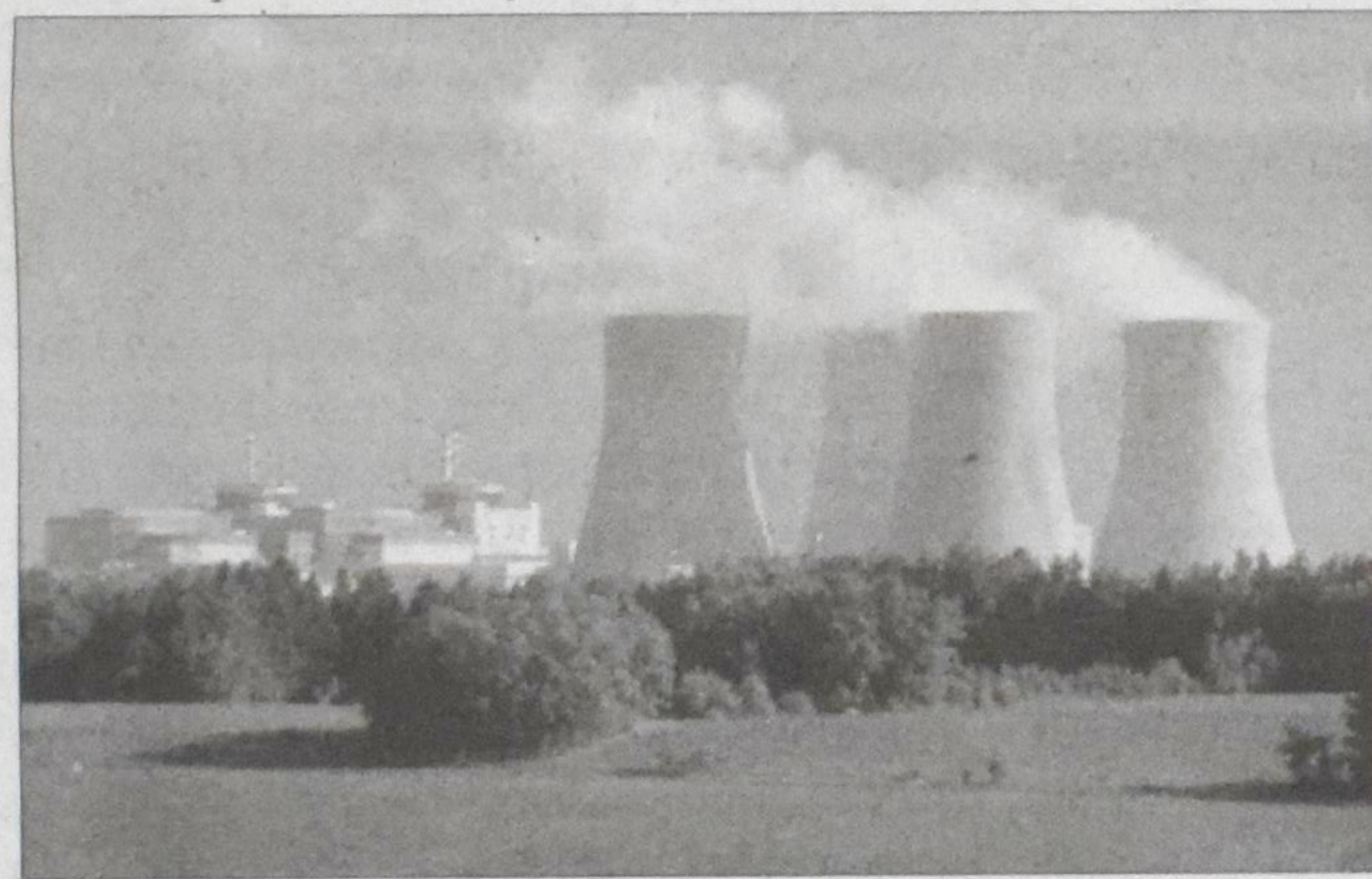
Sometimes in science the same information is important at a very small and a very large scale. In physics, for example, our understanding of atoms is informed by our knowledge of stars and astronomy. The same processes that fuel nuclear reactors (atomic energy) are part of the process that energizes stars. In nuclear reactors we currently use fission (breaking down uranium), and some are hoping to use fusion (joining hydrogen atoms) for energy, while fusion is the main energy source that keeps our sun and other stars shining. Our understanding of the basic forces in the universe is guided both by what we know about stars, galaxies and black holes, and by what happens in particle accelerators when fundamental particles like electrons and protons are accelerated to high speeds and collided.

While it is a younger science than astronomy, neuroscience has the same divide between large and small that together gives us a better understanding of the brain God has given us. Our brains are much smaller than the cosmos but can be studied at a macro and a micro level. The macro approach looks at what specific parts of the brain do. Micro analysis examines the function of a neuron in the brain, either individually or as a class.

At a macro level, in the past, the primary way to learn how an area of the brain functioned was to identify what abilities were lost if that area was somehow damaged and no longer worked properly (the loss of speech after left side brain damage, for instance). Now neuroscientists use a number of new imaging technologies to watch the brain doing its work in real time. These imaging technologies illumine whole areas and can help clarify which parts are active. For example, when we read a *Christian Courier* column, first the visual system in the back of our brain "lights up" or is



The same processes that fuel nuclear reactors help to energize stars.



more active, then various language areas mostly in our left hemisphere work harder. Which language areas activate depends on whether we are reading silently or aloud.

At a micro level, we look at what is done by particular neurons or neurotransmitters (the molecules that carry messages from one neuron to the next); we can use various drugs to turn on and off the specific neurotransmitter actions. We are now able to target the genes that are responsible for a particular neurotransmitter and both turn off or over-express these genes. By these methods, we understand how morphine and heroin reduce pain but are also addicting drugs: they have these effects because they mimic what the brain's endorphin system does normally. Specific neurotransmitters often have multiple functions, and endorphins control our pain sensitivity but also are active in our "pleasure system" which tells us when something is good.

Together these two levels of analysis enhance our understanding of how brains work. The macro level tells us which areas are important to movement and the micro level highlights the specific neurotransmitter systems implicated. So, in a disease like Parkinson's, we know that the basal ganglia are important and that Parkinson's worsens as dopamine neurons in this area die. If drugs are used to augment the functioning of the remaining dopamine neurons, people with Parkinson's disease can live a healthier life for an extended period. Unfortunately, researchers have not yet discovered how to prevent the actual death of dopamine cells.

In some manner, this combination of large-scale and small-scale analysis is what we are called to do in studying Scripture. At one level, the Bible is the big story of God's control and care of creation, best shown in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the big story that tells us we are held in loving hands. The love of God informs us how we are to act in this world. At another level, we look to individual parts of Scriptures to tell us who God is, what love is, and how he has guided his people in the past. The Bible is full of real people with complex lives, and it is a blessing to see how God sustains and cares for them, sometimes in spite of their choices. In Scripture the specifics inform but are also shaped by the general. We must not lose sight of both ways of looking at both God's general creation and special revelation.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who analyses rat brain function at a micro level, is a member of Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont.

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Recent findings, small and large:

- In late August astronomers discovered a planet that seems to be made entirely of diamond. Other new-found planets include 16 "super-Earths," which are far bigger than our Earth but potentially similar in composition. One of these super-Earths in particular has conditions that could support life.
- Closer to home, scientists observed record low levels of Arctic summer sea ice, foresaw increased risk of illness and property damage in Europe due to climate change, and predicted that rising sea levels could cost coastal Californian cities hundreds of millions of dollars in coming years.
- Primate researchers discovered the chimpanzees are spontaneously generous, and will choose to reward others more frequently than themselves.
- The American government began devising a method of voting by smart phone, and computer scientists predicted that computers will soon be able to respond to humans by reading our facial characteristics.



But technology doesn't always make our lives better: scientists at the University of Virginia found that 4-year-olds were capable of less focus and self-control after watching just nine minutes of the cartoon "SpongeBob SquarePants."



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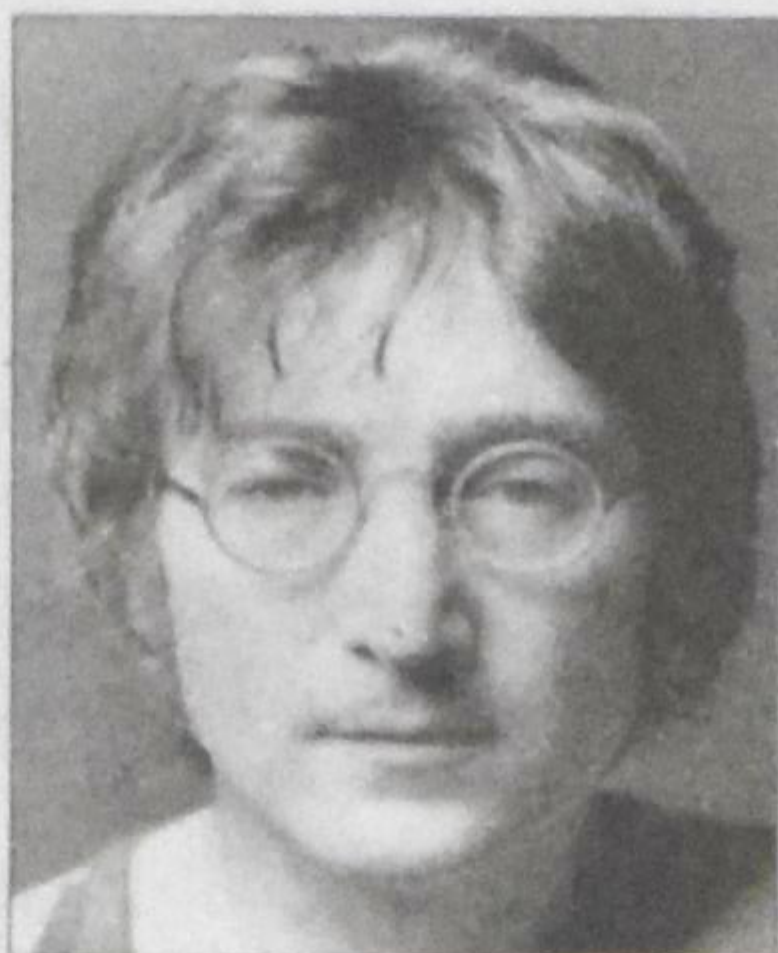
Remembering our heroes



Bert Witvoet

Some people know exactly where they were when President Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963. Others remember what they were doing when John Lennon got shot on Dec. 8, 1980. If you were a Soviet citizen in the 1950s, you would know exactly where you were when Joseph Stalin died of a brain aneurism on March 5, 1953.

Polish Communist party official Wlodek Matwin



Kennedy, Lennon and Stalin each captured the imagination of millions.

remembers that he was in a deep sleep when a colleague from the Central Committee phoned to inform him that Comrade Stalin had died. "I was devastated," says Matwin. "When my dad died I wasn't nearly as shocked." Matwin explains that, like millions of other Soviet citizens, he was in love with Stalin. Not that he thinks that Stalin was such a good man. Rather, he admits Stalin was a scoundrel and a serious criminal. "But," he adds, "you have to say more than that . . . [Stalin] was, in fact, also a great man. People don't want to think that such a combination is possible. I don't know why. This criminal, Joseph Stalin, led us in the war against fascism. That's a fact."

What Kennedy, Lennon and Stalin have in common is that they are all icons. They're not necessarily the greatest people who ever lived, but they captured the imagination of millions of people. Each one of them had a talent that stood out – Kennedy was a skilled orator, Lennon was a great musician, Stalin was a shrewd manager. More could be said to explain their magnetism. Stalin was the most evil,

Kennedy the most playboyish, and Lennon the most idealistic. All three of them were giants. Of them it could be said what Shakespeare's Cassius says about Julius Caesar:

*Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*

All three giants had names that sound ordinary and that start with a "J" – Jack, John and Joseph. Maybe that's where we should start when we remember them. They were ordinary human beings. Their diapers had to be changed when they were babies, and they could not survive without eating and sleeping. But they were destined for fame, partly because we "underlings" elevated them. Of course, the grave leveled these three back to where they started from – dust to dust. Worms are very democratic, and are no respecters of great persons.

Humble heroism

We would do well to ask ourselves what it is about human beings that they want to worship other ordinary human beings. I'm all for recognizing talent, effort and achievement, but why do we turn a blind eye to the failures of our heroes, especially when those "heroes" can in reality be monsters? Even today there are people who idolize Hitler, a pathetically small-minded autocrat. The key to his success was that he was able to hook into the grievances of the population of Germany and make them believe that he could save them. Hitler was, in fact, a type of Messiah.

Which brings me to the real Messiah – Jesus. He was meek, humble and unpretentious – to the point that I have to remind myself from time to time that he is worthy to be worshipped. The other Sunday I attended a church service in Vernon, B.C., and the song leader began by singing: "In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, give me Jesus. Give me Jesus; give me Jesus. You can have all this world, but give me Jesus." I wasn't quite prepared for this simple testimony put to hauntingly simple music. It's as if I needed a sermon first to focus myself on why people can take away the whole world from me as long as they give me Jesus. Is Jesus worth more than all my possessions, my wife, children and grandchildren at 10 a.m. Sunday morning? Dare I sing that with the same conviction as the song leader? Jesus, who are you? More to the point, Jesus, who are you in my life?

Toward the end of the service I had my answer. So to those who remember where they were when one of their Messiahs died, I say, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Bert and Alice Witvoet traveled to western Canada this summer to visit four of their five children and families. The comments in this editorial made by Comrade Wlodek Matwin were taken from Geert Mak's *Europa: Reizen door de Twintigste Eeuw*.

The pastor's wife moves again



Grace Miedema

It's been a few weeks now since we've moved to our new home in a neighbouring town, and we're more or less settled. I tell myself to wait with any judgments until we've been in the new home and community about a year. Experience all four seasons, discover what the gardens, the insulation, the town and church have to deliver.

I find each move is a time of jockeying into position again of "Who am I? What do I want to be? What expectations are there, and to which ones will I respond?" Looking back (this is the sixth time I've moved into a community as "the pastor's wife") I wonder how many of those expectations were internally driven, and how many came from the people in the church. In 1981, I thought being a "pastor's wife" was a calling/role/job all by itself. The pastor's salary automatically included the Mrs., if there was one. However, I don't play organ, and, since I took Latin in high school instead of typing, I wasn't any help as bulletin editor either. The day I felt really at home was when another young mom said, "So nice you're not a real minister's wife." I thought "Aha! I was right! I don't have to listen to those expectations!"

One of the blessings of being the pastor's wife is that you have a ready-made community waiting to take you in. That can be threatening to some I suppose, but I love it. As we moved from congregation to congregation someone once said, "Beware of those who meet you at the train." I think a lot of rural folks must have heard that one, because sometimes it took months for the first coffee invitation outside of the work-related introductory visits. But those intro visits, which my pastor-husband does in every member's home, if possible, are worth gold to me. People's homes often speak volumes about their interests and values and family situations. Those intro visits are like digging the well before you're thirsty. Then, when there is a serious issue, you already have an initial relationship.

Things get complicated

But that's where it gets complicated for me as the minister's wife. I'm not the pastor – not called to do the pastoral visits – but because I know the people I have the opportunity to care. Am I any help in that department? That's part of the "Who am I?" question. I take comfort from Jim Kok's book "90 Percent of Helping is Showing Up." I have opportunities to show up more often than the average person in the church. Sometimes I even make use of those opportunities. Facing a ready-made community – people offering to unpack your ratty and disorganized boxes – or meeting new people facing stresses unfamiliar to them, the question keeps coming up: "Where do I find the boundaries in this situation?" I find it a rich and interesting dance. More than once I've thought of Joshua and God's words through him "Be not afraid."

In all likelihood, this will be the last community we face as pastor and pastor's wife. Things are different in 2011. We've gone through the stages of waiting for babies, being knee-deep in school activities, living with teens who don't want church people in their home, to now being empty nesters. We don't have the natural connections that children bring with them, but we don't need to take their schedules into account either. People feel sorry for me that I had to leave my job. They are afraid I will be discontented. For today I can trust that God will open doors, that he's got a job for me. In 2011, being the "minister's wife" doesn't mean his salary hires her too. Maybe there are other things to do that are more important than paid employment. But paid employment tends to focus the mind and require productivity – good things in the Calvinist world.

The ultimate question for me is "What is the best use of my gifts at this time?" At the same time, the reassessment continues. What sins or strengths will these people draw out of us? Will we grow in wisdom and grace in this place? How will we walk with these people in the next few years? Will we take the opportunity to get involved in local politics? I find it's a balance of waiting and of stepping out in blind faith at every turn, hoping to celebrate God's goodness with the people we meet. And it's already starting, as we had a summer BBQ with our neighbours in our yard last night.

After having lived in Woodstock for nine years, Dirk and Grace Miedema have moved to Aylmer, Ontario, for their sixth church in the 519 calling zone. Grace has served in campus ministry at Fanshawe Community College and later as community support coordinator and spiritual care giver at Homestead Christian Care.

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Letters

"Rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge."

- Proverbs 19:25

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A middle of the road approach to human origins

Occupying space in the midst of the human origins debate is not unlike strolling along the center line of a super freeway; I'm as apt to be hit from one direction as the other. And yet this position, as dangerous as it is, supplies perspectives revealing some curious observations. I find it interesting how Christians believe scientific hypotheses about human origins are discredited when shown to have unproven presuppositions as starting points. Conversely, once these presuppositions are revealed they are taken as proof that creationism is therefore true. Kevin Flatt ("Should we say goodbye to Adam," CC June 27) appears to subscribe to this assumption when he reminds us science is propelled by the "reigning worldview of naturalism" and should be approached with "caution and a healthy scepticism." Wise words indeed. However, Flatt follows the warning with claims that Paul's writings are "*in fact* inspired by God in all their parts" (*italics mine*). He furthermore decries an "erosion of the *authority* of Scripture and the confessions" (*italics mine*). Likewise Peter Stellingwerff, in the opening paragraph of his letter to the editor ("Passé-proof dogma," CC Aug. 8), casually dismisses science before claiming "*the fact* that sin somehow entered the very good creation and touched everything"

(*italics mine*). These aforementioned *facts* and the belief scripture is *authoritative* are by no means certain or proven. They, like basic scientific theories, are the tenants of a belief system necessarily built upon unproven philosophical assumptions.

I have been challenged to approach my own faith with "caution and a healthy scepticism." If we expect this of the scientific community, we must do no less than turn the same light of caution and healthy scepticism upon ourselves. Using words like "fact" and "authority" to describe our own beliefs, and thereby excluding other forms of knowledge, is an arrogance not unnoticed by those of no faith. Our children and grandchildren are already cognizant of this hypocrisy and do not need the likes of me as a "stumbling block" (A. Rumph, "Replacement theology," CC letter to the editor July 25). The stumbling block lies in our unwillingness to challenge our own preconceptions no matter the cost. To quote St. Jerome: "if an offence come out of the truth, better is it the offence come than the truth be concealed."

In the meantime, I'll make myself comfortable in the centre of this freeway of debate. Road-rage does not worry me; I'm very attentive... and nimble.

Ray Stellingwerff
Surrey BC

Is faith disappearing?

Lately we have read many editorials and letters in CC and other Christian magazines about the understanding and meaning of Genesis 1-11. Some of these have been written by professors from Calvin Seminary, Calvin College, King's University College, Wilfrid Laurier University, Asian Theological Seminary and the Institute for Christian Studies. Some of these writers are elders and teachers in Christian churches and schools. We can thus come to the conclusion that these writers are learned men, but it seems that they are forcing us to "rethink the traditional interpretation of the Bible" – as one of them wrote.

I am not a theologian, science student or evolutionist. I have not studied archaeology or biology or DNA analysis. But I am an 80-year-old Christian who has been many times an elder in the CRC and has taught in catechism classes that the Bible is the inspired, everlasting and true Word of God. Now with all the talk of "rethinking" the biblical revelation of creation, there is great danger. Our younger generation and even older people may begin to doubt that what they have learned to be the truth of scripture is indeed true. They may even come to doubt the birth of Jesus and his life on earth as the son of God for the redemption of sinners like we all are.

All that we and our children have learned about the content and message of the Bible is believed by FAITH, not by knowing and not by evidence. My concordance lists 330

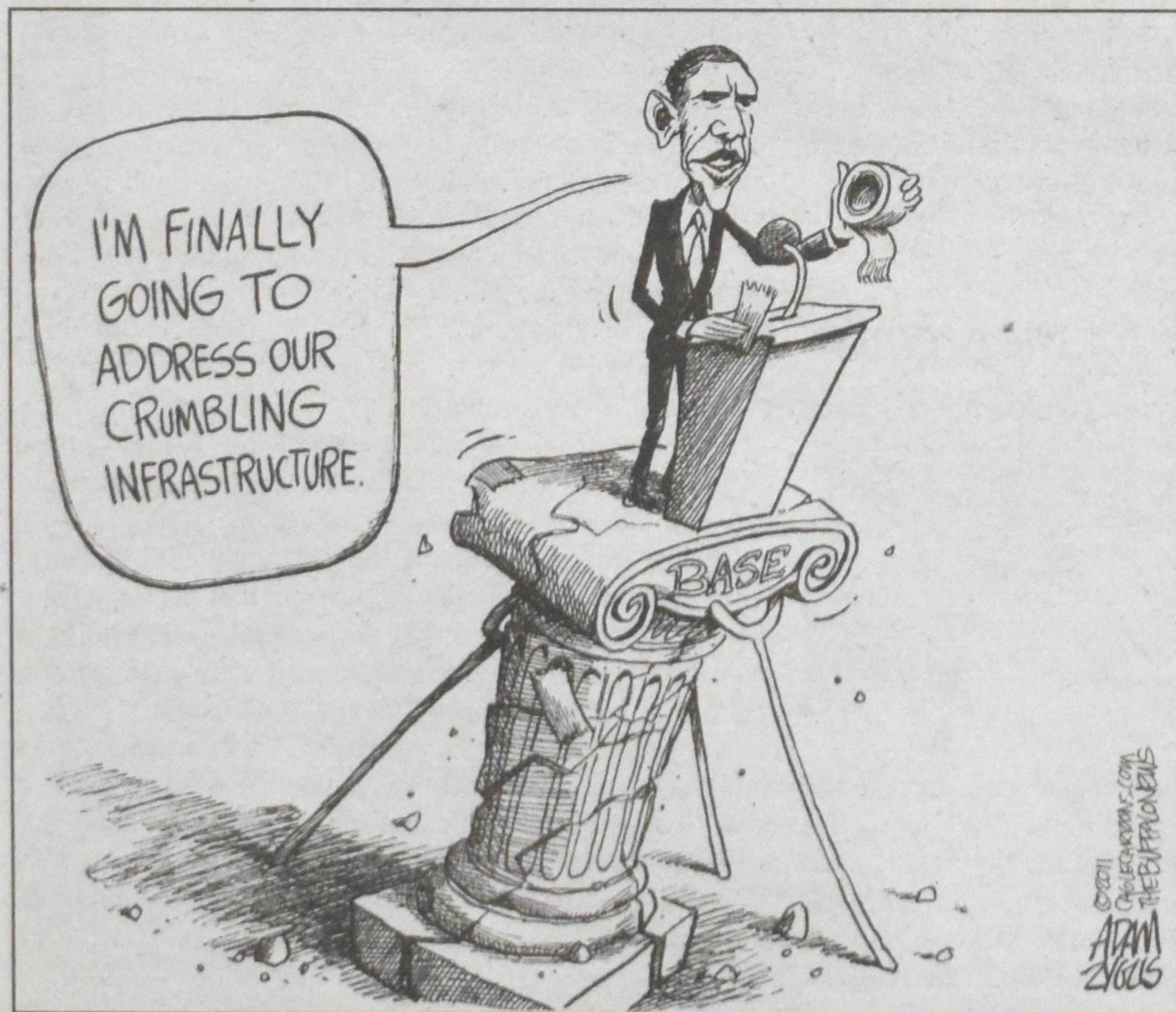
texts with the word FAITH. Hebrews 11 lists 17 people (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph and 11 more) as people who have believed and have not seen what was promised. Jesus, when asked by his disciples about his return to earth, gave them some signs to watch for and one of them was that people would live as in the days of Noah as recorded in Genesis 5. Here we see that Jesus accepted the records of Genesis 1-11. These and many more things in Scripture are written by men but inspired by God. Peter 1:25 tells us that the "word of the Lord endures forever."

If we cannot believe in the creation of Adam and Eve as revealed to us in Genesis because it is claimed by learned men that science shows us it was done through evolution, then we cannot believe that Jesus was born by a virgin who was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:19) – which is as scientifically impossible as the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Many more words and biblical texts can be used to indicate the war between the spirit of God and Satan with his evil spirits. We can and should be glad and thankful that Jesus the Son of God has won over the evil one. Of course, to believe that, we have to believe by FAITH that the Bible is the true eternal inspired word of God. We have to become like little children to believe it because God says so.

Klaas Schenk
Edmonton AB

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News

Ontario church, community rally after tornado

GODERICH, Ontario (CRCNA) – Pastor Stephen Tamming of Trinity Christian Reformed Church spoke for members of his church and many local residents when he said that the spirit of Goderich, Ontario, was not broken by the devastating tornado that had torn through their town near the end of August. The town of 8,000 people lies on along Lake Huron.

Winds of 150 to 200 mph ripped through the downtown area of Goderich on Sunday afternoon, Aug. 21, killing one person, injuring many others and destroying homes and historic buildings in the centre of the town. It was the most powerful tornado to hit the area in many years. Power was cut off and piles of debris were scattered throughout the community.



"We come together in love and support to worship," Tamming said during the Aug. 28 Community Worship Service, held to show solidarity, hope and commitment to the future. "There's a sign at the fire hall that says 'Goderich is the Prettiest and Strongest Community.' How true. We are the prettiest and the strongest because of the people."

Tamming and others spoke in the gymnasium at Goderich Collegiate Institute to about 1,000 people. The service came after a week in which members of Trinity CRC, other

churches, individuals and groups were busy beginning the long-term work of clean up and eventual reconstruction of their town.

One of the groups offering help is the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC).

From cheesecakes to potatoes

In the days after the tornado members of Trinity CRC assisted the Salvation Army to cook suppers for community members. Meals were cooked at the church and brought to a local centre where almost 600 residents, volunteers and workers were served the first night.

"Volunteers of all ages worked together as 12 cheesecakes were made, 30 apple crisps, trays of brownies, hundreds of pounds of potatoes and bushels of apples were peeled, lettuce was cut, coleslaw was diced and buckets of scalloped potatoes were sliced," said Wilma Hiemstra, Trinity's ministry coordinator.

Members of Trinity also helped clean up damaged homes. Meanwhile, Tamming encouraged the local ministerial association to organize the Community Worship Service, at which Trinity led the music and did all the technological work, along with broadcasting on the local radio station. "It's been a hard week, and yet it's been a time of pulling together," said Hiemstra.

Trinity CRC served as a Food Depot this month, providing food, perishable goods, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, baby diapers and other items.

Tamming concluded, "We're going to be alright... Goderich is going to rebuild and be as strong and as beautiful as it has ever been." ➤

Muslims, secularists fight it out for Egypt's future

CAIRO (AsiaNews) – Thousands of young Egyptians have demonstrated in Tahrir Square to urge the army to keep its promises after the fall of Mubarak. Guided by the slogan "Correct the path of the revolution," the protesters demanded the institutions be purged of former regime members, justice reforms and an end to the use of military courts for the trials of protesters arrested in January.

Organized by the liberal parties, including the April 6 Movement, the National Democratic Front Party and the ADL, the protest was boycotted by the Islamic parties, which have tried to minimize the demands of the young liberals, judging them devoid of content.

Fr. Rafik Greek, spokesperson for the Egyptian Catholic Church, explains that for some time now the Muslim parties have obstructed the demonstrations against the army. "The Muslim Brotherhood want to win the November election and seek the support of the military," he says. For the priest and other Christians, Egypt is now split in two. On the one hand there are the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist Islamist traditionalists who want to transform the country into an Islamic republic based on sharia. On the other, democratic parties of secularists who strive for a secular government that respects human rights and religious minorities.

No security, uncertain future

Despite the ongoing trial of Hosni Mubarak, according to AsiaNews sources, little or nothing has changed in the almost eight months since the fall of the Rais. "The people are afraid and do not know what will happen in the future. There is no security on the streets. It's hard to make ends meet because of the severe economic crisis aggravated by social instability," say those sources. They point out that the only factor holding this situation in check is the army. "The military is trying to mediate between the various political factions born after the revolution and the Islamic movements, but in reality that has no impact."

The social crisis is felt particularly in the countryside and in the districts of Upper Egypt, far from the capital where extremists operate undisturbed. "The Salafists want to impose all Islamic ways, such as wudu, the ritual of purification of the body that every Muslim must perform before prayer. Unfortunately in this situation the only victims are Christians and non-Islamic minorities," AsiaNews was told.

According to unconfirmed reports, in the village of Elmarinab (province of Aswan), in early September, a group of Muslims sequestered the entire local Coptic Christian community to force them to demolish the dome of the church of St. George built without the permission of the authorities. ➤

Pakistan: wealthy Christians kidnapped to fund al-Qaida

KARACHI, Pakistan (Fides) – Wealthy Pakistanis, including Christians, are being kidnapped by members of al-Qaida and other terrorist groups in order to gain ransom money for funding their operations, according to the national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Fr. Mario Rodrigues.

Citing the case of Irvin John, a Karachi Christian who was kidnapped and released three weeks later following a large ransom payment, Rodrigues noted "the growth of a phenomenon that has reached alarming dimensions." He has called on civil authorities and police to "take appropriate actions."

"We are all exposed to this risk," says Rodrigues.

"We are potential victims of a practice that is gaining ground in Pakistan, as a form of self-financing of terrorist organizations."

Among the latest victims was the American official Warren Weinstein, head of the Pakistan Initiative for Strategic Development and Competitiveness (PISDAC). Weinstein was kidnapped in August.

According to intelligence sources there are over 40 terrorist groups in Pakistan still connected to either the Taliban network or Al-Qaeda, though Al-Qaeda has been significantly weakened with the death of Osama bin Laden and, more recently, his former second-in-command. ➤

Orthodox priest among challengers to Putin, Medvedev for the Kremlin

MOSCOW (AsiaNews) – While the Putin-Medvedev tandem remains silent on who will be the main candidate in 2012 for President of Russia, official challengers in the race to the Kremlin have emerged. The one creating the most buzz is the temporarily suspended Orthodox priest, Ioann Okhlobystin, who has already become wildly popular on Internet discussion forums, blogs and social networks in Cyrillic.

Okhlobystin's candidacy has provoked surprise and smiles in Russia: an extravagant character and a priest since 2001, he was suspended on his own request in 2010. He proposes to give the country a "philosophical and ideological strategy, which Russia needs to become a nation."

Who will support his candidacy economically and politically is impossible to know. Okhlobystin, 45, counted on the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, but the

church has distanced itself. "So that I can participate in the presidential race seriously," he said, "I need at least the tacit consent of the Church. If that doesn't happen it would be strange, since the church has for decades promoted the values of which I would be the bearer."

Mixed message?

Critics say that except for suggesting that the presidential term be even longer than the existing six-year term, and suggesting a strengthening of the army, the "new candidate" in Russian politics appears somewhat confused, so much so that Okhlobystin claims not to know who to vote for in the December 4 elections for the Duma (the Russian Parliament). In fact, he has said that the very institution of



Parliament is "unnecessary."

For its part, the Moscow Patriarchate says that priests are forbidden to hold political office at every level, except in exceptional circumstances where their candidacy is necessary for the good of the church itself. Patriarch Kirill has already warned Okhlobystin that his suspension from church service could be revoked if he chose to work exclusively as a politician, making it clear that spiritual leaders do not like the prominence of the priest.

At press time, political analysts are still waiting for the announcement of who the "government candidate" will be. It was expected that Putin and Medvedev might make that announcement at the United Russia Congress on September 23-24 in Moscow. It would then be just three more months until the presidential election is held. ➤

News

'Voucher' movement gains traction in U.S. schools

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNA/EWTN News) – As a new school year has gotten under way some schools in the U.S. have seen a spike in enrollment due to more states offering school voucher programs.

The government-issued vouchers allow parents to choose which school they want their children to attend – including private or Christian schools or public "charter" schools. Without the education vouchers, children are assigned to attend public schools within or near their neighbourhoods. As of August 2011, 18 states and the District of Columbia had enacted school voucher policies.



"The school choice movement has picked up during this last year and it's gained a lot of momentum," reported Sister Dale McDonald, director of Public Policy and Educational Research at the National Catholic Educational Association.

"School choice should be promoted because parents are the primary educators of their children and should have the right to choose the best school," Sr. Dale stressed. "Although some parents have the means to send their children to their preferred school, 'others are denied that choice because of their economic situation. We've always felt that parents of low and modest income should have the kind of choices that parents of higher income have for their children.'"

The practice is controversial because of its perceived denigration of public education. Some also insist that it violates the much talked about "separation of church and state" which they erroneously believe is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Vouchers are strongly opposed by the two main public school teachers' unions, the United Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers. However, independent evaluations have revealed improved test scores and other positive effects

on students and a frequently better quality of education at these alternative schools.

Ongoing tug-of-war

Washington, D.C.'s voucher program was authorized by the U.S. Federal government in 2004, that year enabling the parents of 1700 children to choose their school. President Obama defunded the program in 2009 but a voucher bill was reintroduced in late 2010 in the then newly Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

In April, the Indiana Legislature provided vouchers that allow low-and middle-income families to use public funds to help pay non-public school tuition. The Indiana program, which is only the second statewide program in country, has enabled 240 faith-based schools to enroll students with vouchers.

"The Indiana voucher program is a big one this year," Sr. Dale said. "It's a victory that we're happy to promote."

A victory, however, that may be short lived. Opponents of the program recently filed a lawsuit claiming it violates the Indiana constitution's required separation of church and state, given that most of the non-public schools so far approved for the voucher program have religious affiliations. Other states have encountered similar obstacles.

In Colorado, Denver judge Michael Martinez ordered the state's Douglas County to immediately stop its scholarship program on Aug. 12. Judge Martinez similarly ruled that the initiative violates provisions in the state's constitution.

"I think it's a weak argument," Sr. Dale said in response to the claim that vouchers threaten to blur the line between church and state. If the scholarship is given to the parents and the parents make the choice about where to go to school, then the government hasn't made the choice – it has provided parents with a check to make the choice."

Sr. Dale likened vouchers to Medicare or other government assistance. "When you're given a Medicare check or a Social Security check, you can spend it however you want it," she said. "If I take my Social Security check and decide to give it all to the church, nobody questions it – this is the same thing."

Sr. Dale says that an improved understanding of how vouchers actually work will eventually show individuals that "constitutionally, school choice can be supported."

Calvin College expands crucial health program

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Calvin College has expanded its speech pathology and audiology program beginning this academic season and is simultaneously offering a shorter, concentrated five-year bachelor-to-master's program. Until now, it took six years to complete bachelor's and master's degrees.

Calvin's new program will enable the college to increase its work with adult

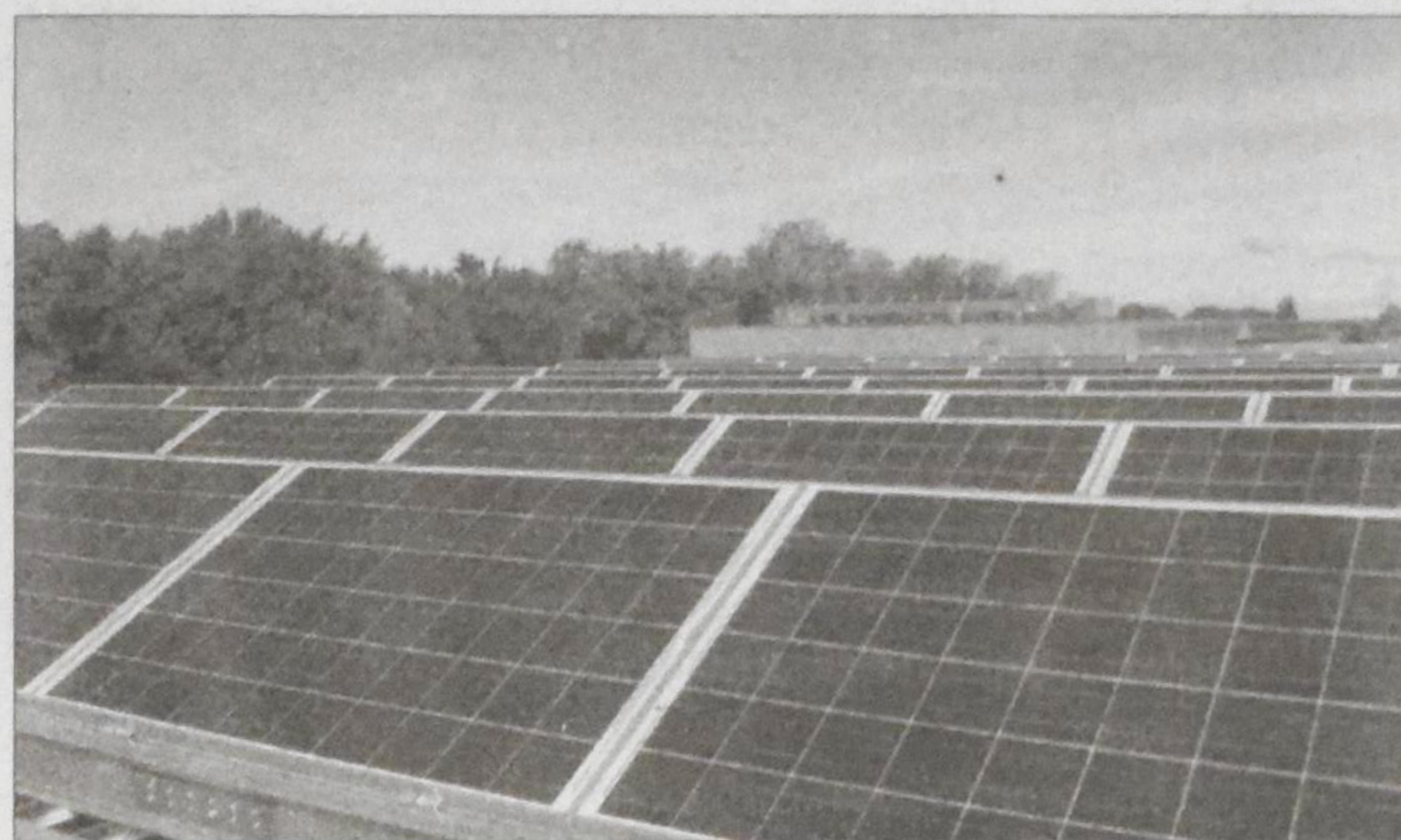
stroke patients and begin offering clinical services for children – infants, toddlers and those who are school-aged – with speech or language challenges. "All of us [professors and clinicians] have worked in a variety of places and we have a lot of experience," said Calvin's clinical director Jill Bates.

The expanded program is all about raising up another generation of speech pathologists who come at their profession

Redeemer College ignites new solar panel project



MATTHEW SCHONEWILLE



MATTHEW SCHONEWILLE

ANCASTER, Ontario (RUC) – The campus of Redeemer University College has seen much construction activity in the last few months. Although most of that work is on ground level, the Redeemer community and guests were invited to look up to the roof line of the Academic Building on the morning of Sept. 12 as Redeemer's new solar panel project was launched.

The project was part of the federal government's Knowledge in Infrastructure (KIP) program. Through this funding, Redeemer installed a 131kw photovoltaic (PV) solar power system along the entire roof of the Academic Building. The long, flat design of Redeemer's roof line and

the lack of tall buildings surrounding the campus made it an ideal location for this technology.

The system, installed by ARISE Technologies of Waterloo, will be operated under the Ontario government's FIT program, allowing Redeemer to sell back to the grid the clean electricity it generates.

The solar panel system is the last of more than 25 projects that have been funded through Industry Canada as part of KIP. Redeemer received grants for 50 percent of the cost of nearly \$6 million worth of capital projects, ranging from laboratory upgrades and the refurbishing of administrative space to campus safety and energy efficiency initiatives. The remaining costs are being covered through the college's annual capital budget and by donations.

Court allows Dutch school to ban headscarves

AMSTERDAM, The Netherlands – An Amsterdam court has ruled that the Roman Catholic Don Bosco College in Volendam is within its rights to ban one of its students from wearing a headscarf.

Imane Mahssan took the school to court after it ordered her to stop wearing a headscarf. But the court sided with the school.

The court ruled that Catholic institutions can generally make their own decisions in matters of religion, as long as they are consistent. The Muslim student knew beforehand that Don Bosco College was a Catholic school and should have realized that wearing a headscarf would cause problems.

The Dutch Equality Commission earlier ruled that such a ban constituted discrimination, while a magistrate in Haarlem disagreed. The Amsterdam court has now confirmed the lower court's judgment.



Columns

Patchwork Words

Melissa Kuipers



I've heard a number of interesting stories over the years about how parents have broached the topic of "the birds and the bees" with their children. Some parents toss a book to their kids and tell them to read it when they get the chance. Others sit down awkwardly and try to break the news with euphemisms or metaphors before their kids hear about it on the schoolyard. While these stories can be humorous because of the awkwardness on both sides, these conversations are of immense importance. Christian parents cannot simply assume that their children have adopted their values when they are being bombarded with images and messages from so many other sources. If parents wish to influence and guide their children through adolescence, they need to regularly take an active role in both educating their children and creating open dialogue.

Technology and sexuality

Mark Regnerus, in his book *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, explains that the digital age is having much more of an impact on adolescents' understanding and knowledge of sex than any school curriculum. Because of this, "what parents say about sex has probably never been more important than it is today." Having taught high school, I've had many rude awakenings to the fact that we adults are often oblivious to the very important role that technology plays in adolescent relationships. Parents are buying laptops and footing cell phone bills, but often have little awareness of the content crossing their children's screens. Many teens are using Facebook as a means of expressing sexuality through provocative pictures and messaging. Particularly young girls often feel pressure to post sexualized images of themselves over social networking sites. As well, the increasing popularity of "sexting" (phone sex via text messaging) is a means of sexual expression which many teens consider safe without taking into account the emotional and relational ramifications.

Social education

One of the most prevalent ways in which teenagers are learning about sex is simply through discussion with their friends. Regnerus explains, "A very common learning pattern among girls does not involve parents at all, but rather a process that begins when a friend or peer engages in intercourse, and information about that experience trickles back to friends in a direct or circuitous path. Parents' own perception of themselves as a key source of sexual information also tends to considerably outpace or contradict children's assessments of parents as sex educators." That said, Regnerus' statistical evidence indicates the children in fact "tend to prefer a parent to a peer as a source of information... and typically rate parents highest in measures of overall influence."

Dealing with adolescent sexuality

The importance of open communication

Regardless of the very prevalent influence of technology, media and friend groups, what parents have to say about sex is undeniably influential. However, while most parents are in fact talking to their children about sex, these conversations are not always as effective as we might hope. Regnerus explains that "In one study, 72 percent of mothers 'strongly agreed' that they had talked with their adolescent children about sex, but only 45 percent of the youth concurred." What this means is that "A discussion might be memorable for an anxious parent, but unless the messages are clear, an adolescent may either not recall it or have a muted idea of the conversational intent."



Many parents are surprised to find out that their teenagers are using their phones for "sexting."

I'm not suggesting parents should regularly ask pointed questions about their children's sexual practices or those of their friends and classmates, or rigorously monitor their screen time (though balanced forms of monitoring are important). Quite often this will create a rift where a child feels defensive and guarded. Teenagers deeply value their friendships and if they feel their parents care about all aspects of their social lives, they are much more likely to be honest and open about the ways in which they are communicating with their friends. Feeling that their relationships are important and interesting to their parents will make teens much more willing to apply their parents' values in their interactions.

The need for on-going discussion

In a culture where sex is being defined in very diverse ways, "having the talk" needs to be more than an explanation of the mechanics of where babies come from and needs to look at the emotional and relational nature and purpose of sex. Parents may need to research the ways in which sex is being experienced and explored in their children's culture (the book I've referenced here is a great place to start), and to create an open environment wherein adolescents feel they can raise sensitive subjects. In this setting parents can convey the beauty, complexity and significance of sex, can empower their teenage children to make wise decisions in their relationships (romantic or otherwise) and help them understand the importance of waiting to explore sexuality within the context of a life-time commitment.

Melissa Kuipers (mckuip@gmail.com) is a full-time student completing her Masters of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Toronto.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



Earth-keeping: Our identity

For quite some time now it has been fashionable to blame the Judeo-Christian "work ethic" for despoiling nature. The criticism goes something like this: the Bible speaks of human beings having *dominion* over creation, of *subduing* it, and *filling* it. The record shows (say the critics) that this has led to an exploitative view of nature, often involving massive pollution and environmental degradation.

I'd like to suggest that this criticism has some merit: still today we hear of people acting as if nature exists solely for the purpose of human wants and needs, as if it has other value. Sadly, people with such an attitude sometimes defend themselves by referring to the Bible.

This is very unfortunate, because the words of the Bible actually suggest quite a different attitude towards creation. I'd like to explain by means of an anecdote. My youngest brother, Kevin, said this about his mother in a tribute he wrote about her life:

Mom [was] an unwitting shelter when I took advantage of my "youngest" status by tormenting my older brothers. I may have been somewhat dozy about life in general, but I knew that hiding behind mom usually preserved me from being justifiably homicided.

In Kevin's report is his sense of being protected, guarded and "preserved" from harm which, I think, he deserved, although we would never have "homicided" him.

There are other ways in which children are protected by their parents. They are taught about bicycle safety, or about not running out into the street without looking both ways, and about pulling electric cords out by holding the plug, not the cord.

Keeping as calling

All of these are ways of protecting, guarding and nurturing children. An older English word can be used to summarize this attitude: *keeping*. To *keep* someone is to protect, cherish, and guard that person. It is like caring for a precious jewel, only more so.

In the Judeo-Christian religions, God is said to be a *keeper*, one who cares for, guards, and protects human beings. (The most concentrated use of this terminology is in Psalm 121, where the Hebrew word for *guard* is used eight times in a short poem.)

That same idea is used in the ancient book of Genesis where human beings are given the task of *keeping* creation: "tend it [the earth] and keep it" says one translation.

Far from abusing creation, human beings are to reflect the Creator by being *creation-keepers*. This idea may resonate with First Nations traditional spirituality.

An eminent environmentalist at the University of Wisconsin, Calvin de Witt, suggests that human beings should be "guard'ners" of creation. Not despoilers.

This still leaves us with the results of centuries of continuing natural degradation. Mostly we are faced not with preservation but with the results of an exploitative mindset. In such a situation, *restoration* seems to me to be the difficult, but obvious direction to go.

Good examples

In British Columbia we have examples to follow, *witnesses* we might say, to a better way.

Eric Collier, author of *Three Against the Wilderness*, said of his unpaid lifetime labours to restore the environment near Meldrum Creek in B.C.'s interior: "What others before had destroyed, I might restore."

At a time when beavers had been virtually exterminated in that part of the Chilcotin, water levels fluctuated wildly and wildfires were a constant hazard due the lack of water barrier (streams, marshes) in dry years, Collier and his family set out to restore the land: "if sweat and toil could do it, we'd back to the land some of the wild life and other natural wealth that it had when Lala [his First Nations mother-in-law] was a child."

But where to find beavers to dam the creeks, control the outlets of lakes, and raise the water table with their marshes? When a warden finally brought two pairs of live-trapped beavers to become the nucleus of a restored population, he advised Collier, "Guard them and care for them as if they were children." *Keep them*, you might say, echoing Biblical language.

When I was recently in Terrace, B.C., and saw the Aug. 13, 2011, edition of *The Terrace Standard*, with three lengthy articles on local work being done to restore salmon habitat, I thought of Collier, and of the Bible.

Being an earth-keeper is not an optional calling. Earth-keeping is, I am convinced, a defining aspect of humanity.

This column was adapted from a sermon

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) wrote and delivered in Terrace CRC.

Parts of this sermon and column also appeared in *The Terrace Standard* newspaper. The author and his lovely young wife, Betsey, are earth-keepers at their farm in Quick, B.C.



Guard them and care for them as if they were children.

Reviews

Former war child makes music for peace

Walter Miedema

Can anything good come out of the numerous tragedies that Africa has suffered? While at times it may be difficult to answer yes, Emmanuel Jal is someone who proves that this is true. Jal has survived a horrific childhood as a fighter in the Sudan People's Liberation Army to become an internationally known singer and rap star based in the United Kingdom.

Jal was born in a small town in what is now South Sudan. He was three years old when the second Sudanese civil war broke out. His father was working for the army in another area of the country and his mother was killed by soldiers loyal to the government in the north. At this point, Jal and many other children were taken to Ethiopia with the promise of education but instead they were recruited to fight for the SPLA. During his time in Ethiopia a news team came to document life in the camp. Because Jal was an outspoken child he became an unofficial spokesman for the children that the SPLA had recruited. Some of the most powerful moments in the documentary film focus on Jal's life.

Jal first got into making music while at school in Kenya after being rescued by Emma McCune as a way to cope with the pain and the memories he had from his time as a child soldier. Jal's most engaging music addresses his experiences as a child soldier directly. The final track on *War Child* is named "Emma" after McCune, who got him out of the SPLA splinter group for which he fought. McCune rescued some 150 young soldiers including Jal from military service. She was also married to Reik Machar, one of the two leaders of the SPLA, who is the current Vice President of South Sudan. During their relationship, she did much to influence him to stop using

children as soldiers under his command. McCune died while pregnant in a car accident in 1993 in Nairobi.

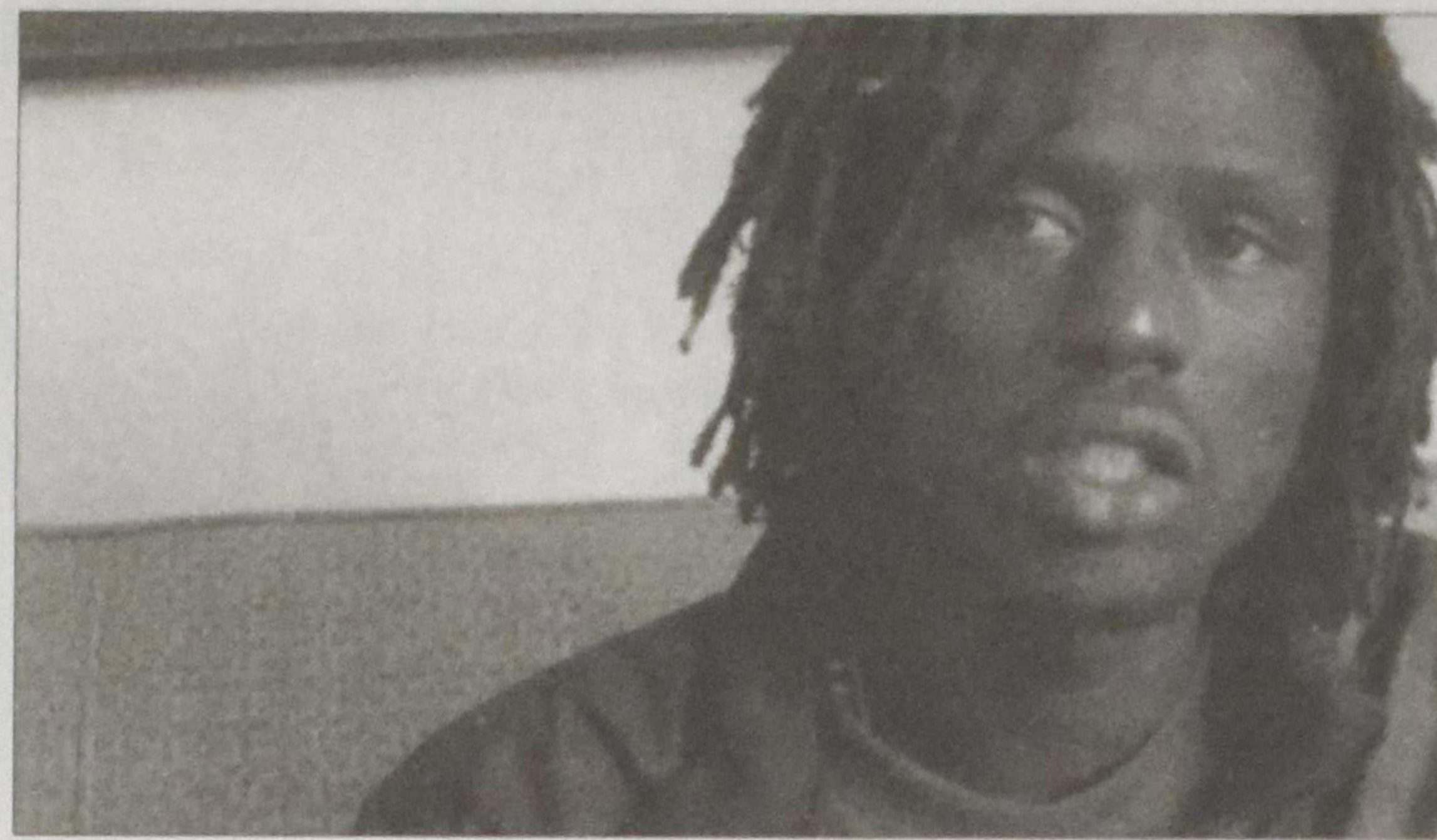
Hip hop and Rap are both very popular styles of music in Africa. Jal was able to start producing music and had his first hit while in Kenya. "Gua," the title track of his first album, became a number one hit in Kenya and gained Jal international recognition when it was included in *The Rough Guide to the Music of Sudan* and a 2005 album organized by the British NGO, War Child. Jal also performed as part of the historic Live 8 concert, where he was introduced by Peter Gabriel.

Jal does not fit into the stereotype most people hold about Hip Hop and Rap artists. In North America, these musical genres are connected with violence. Jal, on the other hand, sees his fame as an opportunity to promote peace. The opening line of the title track of Jal's *Warchild* album states this clearly. "I believe I have survived for a reason / To tell my story to touch lives."

Jal is also uncomfortable with the highly sexualized and materialistic culture of the Hip Hop/Rap community. A number of his songs on *Warchild* address this.

Jal's second album embodied his message of peace in a strong way. Not only does its title call for a *Ceasefire*; it is a collaboration between Jal, a Christian from the south, and Abd El Gadir Salim, a Muslim musician from the north.

In addition to speaking out for peace and the concerns of Africa, he has also used his financial success to sponsor scholarships that will allow a few children to attend the school he attended in Kenya. He has also been able to pay tuition for at least one of his siblings and fund



The documentary film as well as his autobiography and his *War Child* and *Ceasefire* albums are widely available online.

the building of a school in his home town.

Jal is an energetic performer and dances with abandon on stage when not singing. His energy and positive attitude, as well as his understated sense of humor are infectious. In interviews and conversation, Jal is surprisingly calm and soft-spoken.

Much of the strength of Jal's music comes more from the poignant nature of its subject matter, especially that which addresses his war child experience. His music suffers somewhat from the cliché disapproval of the excesses of hedonistic Hip Hop lifestyle. It is, however, refreshing to hear the poetry of biblical language mixed into this genre of music. Jal's music also stands out because of his use of traditional African rhythms. Most of his lyrics are in English, but Jal raps in Arabic, Swahili, Nuer, and Dinka languages.

Walter Miedema (walter.p.miedema@gmail.com) lives and writes in Vancouver, B.C.



Memoir explores the intersections of hope and despair

Nick Schuurman

*Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.*

While Shauna Niequist may or may not have ever read these words that were written centuries ago by the great Romantic poet William Blake, she captures, in her most recent book, the very same sentiment. "Bittersweet," she writes, "is the idea that in all things there is both something broken and something beautiful, that there is a

sliver of lightness on even the darkest of nights, a shadow of hope in every heartbreak, and that rejoicing is no less rich even when it contains a splinter of sadness."

And so it is with life. This side of eternity, neither grief nor happiness exist or are ever experienced undiluted. While the 19th century poet explored and gave language to this truth through verse, Niequist chose the prose of memoirs.

She describes the joy of a wedding mixed, like wine and vinegar, with the pain and heartbreak of absence, a loss that is remembered. The birth of a child – an experience for which a parent can seldom find language adequate enough to describe – is occasioned by intense pain, and opens up worlds of terrifying possibilities. In all things, east of Eden, life is bittersweet.

Of the stories she tells, perhaps most moving is her description of the experience of miscarriage. She sat down, on what would have been her due date, had her pregnancy been a healthy one, and put pen to page. The experience, she discovers, so uniquely intense and particular in the ache it leaves, simply cannot be truly understood unless one is made to walk through it on their own: "Of course I knew women who had miscarried: my mother, my cousin, my friends. But like anything, when it happens to you, it's like waking up to a conversation you've heard before and only now grasp, and you realize entirely anew what they were talking about, what they were trying to find words to describe."

And yet even here, in the midst of even *this*, there "runs a joy with silken twine." This is Niequist's gift to readers. We have all heard and spoken clichés into situations of suffering. We have all been told to "look for the silver lining" and anticipate the good that God can bring about through our experience of pain. Niequist simply and gently tells stories. Unadorned stories of shared meals, unemployment, a growing family, of moving to a new place.

In a word, *Bittersweet* is honest. Niequist is honest in her description of difficult situations, and honest in describing the hurt and doubt they have left her with. She also honestly describes the enormous number of things which have given her intense joy (her love of and gratitude for food and shared

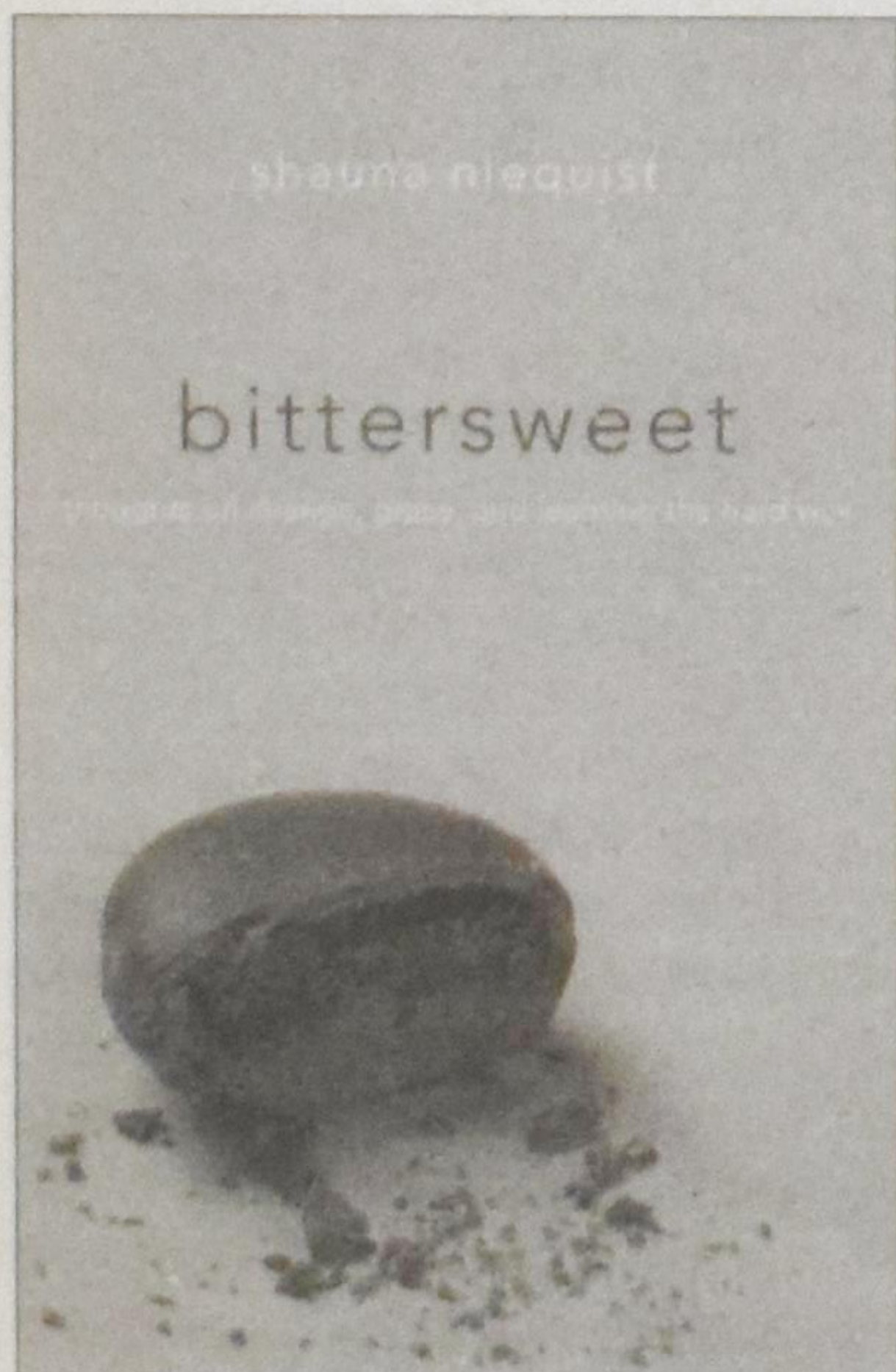
meals for example, are a common theme, and appropriately lend themselves to the book's title).

As a writer, Niequist resembles Donald Miller, and is something of a more feminine Anne Lamott (with no ill regards to Lamott or her writing). For a memoir, her chapters are often more observation-driven than based in strict narrative, which frees her up from the standard "this is my life experience, and this is the lesson I learned from it" formula.

I am worried that this book will be tucked away into a niche, as a book written for women. It is a memoir, and the author's life happens to be that of a woman, a wife, and a mother. She addresses fellow women a lot, but even with these experiences that are in a sense only truly understood by other women, I hope *Bittersweet* does not get pigeonholed.

If you are feeling frayed, broken, or weary, go find this book. The short chapters, packed with simple, yet deliberate reflection will help you find a little rest. Reading this book is the literary equivalent to learning to breathe slowly, deeply and with intention again: "This is what I've come to believe about change: it's good, in the way that childbirth is good, and heartbreak is good, and failure is good. By that I mean that it's incredibly painful, exponentially more so if you fight it, and also that it has the potential to open you up, to open life up, to deliver you right into the palm of God's hand, which is where you wanted to be all along, except that you were too busy pushing and pulling your life into exactly what you thought it should be."

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is reviews editor for CC.



Bittersweet by Shauna Niequist. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

Features

A memorial for Papoose

Emily Wierenga

Outside the moon was full, like a womb, and we placed hands on the place where our newborn grew, and we prayed, as we did every night, for the child we called "Papoose." It had only been five weeks, but already, we were parents. *A family*. My husband and I looked at each other in the light of the amber sky; smiled, there in our double bed, tucked into our tiny home in the small town of Blyth.

It had been a year and a half, and we'd thought it would never happen for the doctors had said it wouldn't, but it did. Trenton had announced it over supper last night with my parents and grandparents, inserting it into grace as he'd dreamed of doing for so long: "And we thank you, God, for the bun cooking in Emily's oven. Amen."

There had been silence and then a cacophony of sound, of exclamation and tears for the wonder of it all, before biting into ham and potatoes. "I didn't think it was possible," my grandfather whispered and I nodded, placed a palm where my stomach still lay flat, hoping somehow to protect our unborn miracle. The line on the stick had been faint, but it had been a line, and the blood test had confirmed a presence of life. "Grow baby, grow," I prayed.

We'd already begun planning where the bassinette would go, the swing, the play-mat, and I'd started researching names on the Internet, and we'd shared the news with our praying friends. "It's important to be transparent," my husband told me, after I cautioned, "Most people wait until 13 weeks. Until they've heard the heartbeat, and the danger zone is passed." But there's no silencing a proud father, and the world celebrated with us.

As we lay in bed, the moon round and full, Trent snoring soft beside, his arm tucked around his child, I wondered who it was that unfolded within. Would it be a she, or a he, and would it have Trent's dark hair or my fair looks? Would it love to kick a ball and climb trees, or read *Anne of Green Gables* and sketch flowers? But more

Eternity, by Emily Wierenga (canvaschild.com)

than anything, I wondered if it would know its worth: its miracle-worth, and how to teach our child the gift that is life?

I fell asleep smiling and woke up sweating cold, for I'd dropped it. I'd dropped our child, and I couldn't find it. I scrambled amongst the bed sheets, still in the dark of my mind, and cried and Trent woke to find me clutching the quilt. "It's gone," I said, frantic. "My baby's gone."

He took me close, hushed me quiet, smoothed back my hair, but he couldn't ease the pain. I'd failed my child in my dreams. How could I ever protect him or her in real life?

The hurting arrived the night I was supposed to release my first book at a local bookstore. I called the health line to find out if cramping was normal, the kind of cramping that folded you, twice, for the pain. They told me to put my feet up and wait. So I called the bookstore and my sister presented the book for me and I sat on my couch and I waited. For the pain to stop, for prayers to be answered, for my husband to come home. And I kept my hand planted to my womb and tried to keep our baby from feeling my tears. I sang lullabies and begged God and day turned to night and Trenton arrived home from playing squash, surprised to find me on the couch when I should have been at the bookstore, and one look at my white face and he crouched down on the floor by my stomach and put his own hand on top of mine, and said, "Everything's going to be okay."

Only it wasn't. The cramping didn't stop, and we rushed to the doctor's the next morning to have blood taken and then, more waiting, and all I could see was the moving van parked in front of our house packing up the bassinette, the play-mat, the swing, and they didn't hear

me, didn't see me waving my arms and telling them to stop, that this is our miracle child and I'm not going to let anything happen, because they knew: I'd already dropped it. So these fictitious moving men just shook their heads and the van rolled away and I was left a mess of cramps and tears.

The day the doctor called me in, Trent took a day off from teaching math so he could hold my hand. We sat silent in the waiting room, trying to ignore the babies in mothers' arms and the children at the toy box and I couldn't figure out where to look, so I stared at my wedding ring, twisting it around.

The doctor called our names, and she looked kind and worn and pushed her glasses up and peered down at the papers in her hands. "I'm afraid I've got some bad news," and that was all I heard. Trent told me later she'd said it wasn't my fault, that there'd been something wrong from the beginning, that the baby hadn't lived past five weeks and there had never been a heartbeat, but I didn't believe him, because I'd felt it growing inside me.

I couldn't return to our empty home, so we went to the beach instead.

There, on the rocks and the sand and the shore, we built a memorial to Papoose, and with each stone placed, I felt a giving way. I felt a lifting, and then I lay in Trent's arms and we watched the tide wash up all white and green and as it swept back, it took my pain. Slowly easing me into the truth that it wasn't my fault. I hadn't dropped my baby. I couldn't have saved it or done anything better.

While everything in me told me I should have, while everything in me screamed to be in control, I knew, there were some things I just had to let go.

"At least we know we can get pregnant," Trent whispered into my ear.

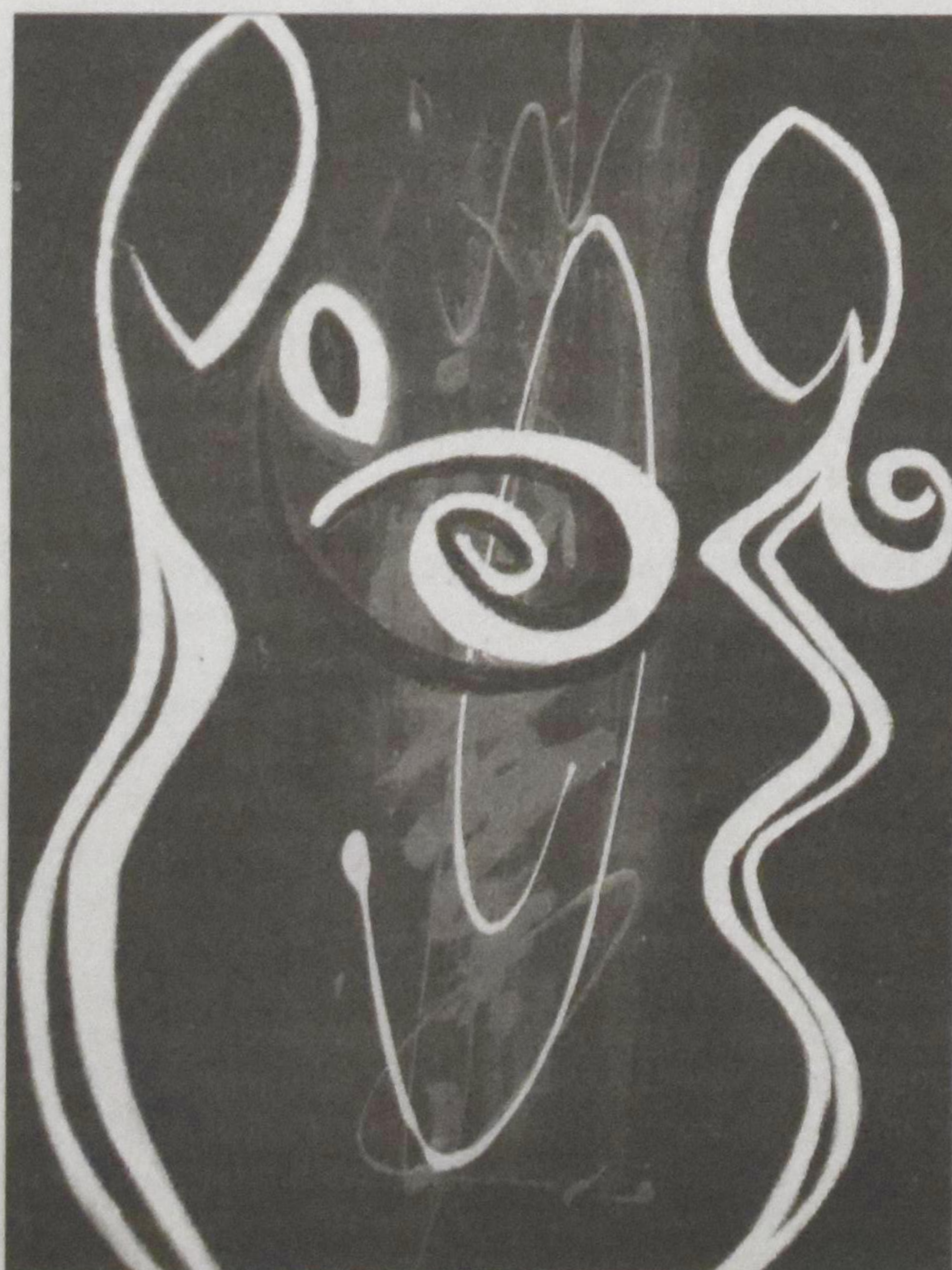
We sat there, beside our stone memorial, while gulls dipped and water cleansed and we clung to each other, to the hope that had been.

The words were scribbled blue and small on the calendar: 13 weeks.

Today, Papoose would have been 13 weeks growing. I breathed deep and put my hand on my womb and cried a little. Outside my window, a woman pushing her stroller, and everything in me wanted to feel angry but I remembered the beach, the water, and again, I let my pain go, watching it float away on the tide.

It hurt, this letting go. This trusting that God had a plan even though I couldn't see it. But even as the blood came and our baby washed into the earth, even as my womb healed and the cramping disappeared, I learned to celebrate. The family we'd been for five weeks. The dreams we'd shared. And I began to believe, all over again, in miracles. ➤

Emily Wierenga is an author, artist and freelance writer who lives with her husband and two boys in Neerlandia, AB. For more information, please visit emilywierenga.com

New birth, by Emily Wierenga (www.canvaschild.com)

Features

The deepest joys from the darkest places



Lisa and Mateo "A time to love..." Ecc. 3:8.

Lisa López Smith Unexpectedly expectant

All too often, a well-intentioned person would comment: "Wow! You're pregnant! You must be so excited!" Me, endlessly polite, and not wanting to cause a fuss, can only fight back tears, and mumble: "Hmmm," hoping that it is enough of a response to end the conversation immediately. How I really feel is not socially appropriate for discussion.

Many of my friends have spent the last few years buying puppies and gerbils to fill that maternal gap – that intense desire to procreate which seems to come from the depths of their being. Then there is me: late twenties and happily married, seemingly ripe for this sort of development. I couldn't help but wonder occasionally if some mothering instinct would suddenly kick in for me, too, and demand attention. But, not so, didn't happen. I'm still waiting.

The shock of the <+> morphed into a sadness and anger that has lingered for months. I am being dragged, with heels firmly digging in, to this sacred realm of motherhood with a tsunami of tears to accompany me there. My husband thinks that it is great news; my friends and family are ecstatic. I feel so alone feeling like I do. I feel so guilty. Am I less of a woman for not particularly wanting a kid now? Am I wrong in the honesty of my feelings? Or, am I just wrong for not truthfully stating how distraught I am with being pregnant?

There must be hundreds of reasons why we can be unhappily pregnant, just as there are reasons to be unhappily not pregnant. Yet, there are so few of these reasons that seem to be socially acceptable to talk about. The expectations of how I should feel are overwhelming. That bears repeating: the expectations – the "should's" – drown me, crush me, pin me. Shouldn't I want to go out and buy soft, fuzzy things? Shouldn't I be pouring over name books, painting a nursery, be signing up for prenatal classes and gleefully posting pictures of my expanding belly and ultrasound to Facebook? No! Every part of me screams: I've just been accepted to the graduate program of my dreams! My life is good how it is and I

don't want anyone or anything to change it!

Yet, the Creator is wise in giving us such a long gestation period to get used to the idea. And I am blessed by the support of my midwives who refer me to BC Women's Hospital, which has a whole department dedicated to women who feel just like I do! I am less alone in the company of people who understand. As the hormonal outrages of the early months fade, I shuffle through phases of being paralyzingly hopeless, to resignedly glum, and eventually, pleasantly indifferent.

I am becoming awestruck at the amazement of my body. I find visits to the midwife to be rather fascinating. I calculate how the frequency of my weeping decreases as weeks go by, and I get increasingly curious about how the body produces tears in such varying amounts. Life is full of journeys, and this is just a different sort for me. If there is one thing that I've learned in my many travels around the world, it is that new places are generally full of emotional extremes. And, those sweetest, dearest of moments are always worth the burden of a few dark nights. I hope that I can start to enjoy the journey. I hope one day I will see the kid as a blessing. I hope one day it will be okay for people to discuss unsavory, unexpected feelings, as no one should ever feel as isolated as this. I hope one day that I can honestly say that these black days were just the beginning of another amazing journey.

Unexpectedly blessed

Thirty-nine weeks and five days. It took every moment of that time, and every tear that fell to be completely ready. Again and again I read "Unexpectedly Expectant" and I could not change a single word of it, and how it was my truth. But I savour what those moments taught me. I am grateful for the love I received, even from those who could not understand. I am grateful for the heartache and loneliness of the journey that brought me here. There is much truth to the Persian proverb: "When it is dark enough, you can see the stars."

Two days later, the pain was there to ground me in the present. The time was a link to the past; to the women who, for centuries and centuries before me, were brave and strong. The time was a powerful link to the future, too. A child represents new possibilities, new eyes to see, new hands to serve, new strength, new love, new connections. That is a future to be a part of! And so Mateo was placed in our arms, Mateo – "Gift of God," because that is precisely what he is.

Changes can be good and changes can be difficult. But this is a time of hope because new beginnings are good things. I am a four week old. A four week old mother. Unexpectedly blessed. My fallible hands have been entrusted with a most amazing treasure. Sometimes this good overwhelms. It is such difficult good – this responsibility that I am completely unqualified for, and

which inspires further tears. Yet I am happy to add this title to my being: mama. I am more than what I was before because it was such a struggle to get here.

There is something about the innocence and goodness of a child that makes the world stop just to watch him breathe. It takes time to reach this point of complete awe. I love to wake up with him snuggled against me. I love the blue eyes that seek out my eyes, the smiles, to watch him discover the world, the way he stretches his body: arms out and back arched. I love the way his fingers curl around mine, the sweet face, and the way he sneezes just like his papa. I love how this small person is already growing a personality.

Mateo, my child: I will give you the best of me so that you can learn to give the best of you. You are welcome to my world and to my life. You are my unexpected blessing

Lisa López Smith and her family recently moved to British Columbia from Mexico, and she is the author of a children's book: Just Like I Love You! She notes: Statistics gathered by BC Women's Hospital's Reproductive Mental Health Department (<http://bcwomens.ca/Services/HealthServices/ReproductiveMentalHealth/default.htm>) show that one in 12 women will experience mental or emotional disorders in relation to their reproductive health. I hope my article will inspire other women to get help if they need it!

Afraid of motherhood

Blog entry: May 13, 2011

Rachel Held Evans

I'd always assumed that Dan and I would start a family just as soon as we became independently wealthy or I turned 30, whichever happened first.

Well, in three weeks I turn 30, (no major news to report regarding our progress toward independent wealth), which means I've been thinking a lot about "the plan," wondering if perhaps it might be adjusted.

It's been a spring full of baby showers and big announcements. Most of my close friends are either pregnant or nursing new babies. And on top of that, for the month of May I'm focusing my research and experiments for the "biblical womanhood" project on motherhood – interviewing moms, reading a shelf-full of parenting books, babysitting each week, investigating the Quiverfull movement, sorting through the Bible's many confusing passages related to childbirth and motherhood, and confronting my own fears about starting a family...which are many.

I've been punished by fellow Christians for saying this out loud, but it's the truth: I'm afraid of motherhood.

I'm afraid that having children will disrupt our happy marriage.

I'm afraid that starting a family will put a swift end to my career.

I'm afraid that I will never figure out how to use diaper genies.

I'm afraid that my inability to multi-task will make me a bad mom.

I'm afraid of losing myself in a world of diapers and Dora and nursery themes and mommy wars.

I'm afraid of being totally responsible for another life.

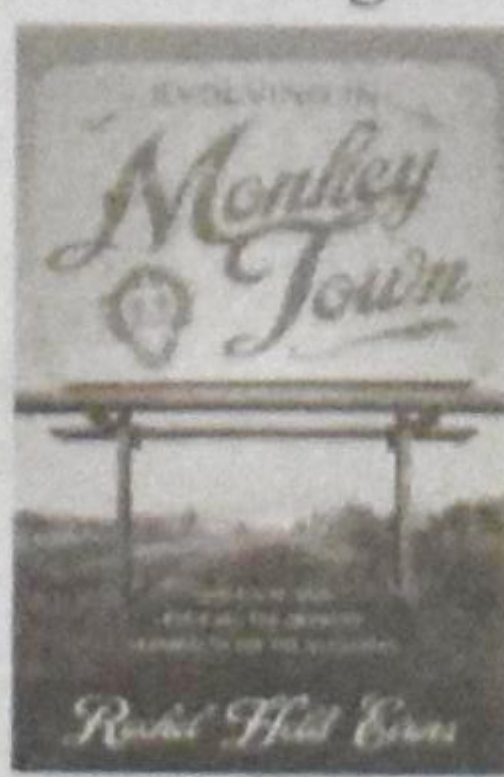
I'm afraid of bringing into this world a little person who can and probably will be hurt and disappointed.

And I'm afraid that I have to figure out my own faith before I can pass it along to a new generation.

I realize that many of these fears are either selfish or unfounded, but that doesn't change the fact that they are there, creeping into my mind at every baby shower and in every babysitting session. Unfortunately, the Church is not the easiest place to express such fears out loud. **On more than one occasion I've been told that because I am not a mother, I am not qualified to write a book about womanhood. The implication is that a childless woman isn't a whole woman, that I can't possibly offer any insights into my role as a woman in the Church until I've procreated.**

And never, in all my years of expressing these fears, have I been told by a Christian, "Well, you don't *have* to have children." The assumption that if I can I must simply go without saying.

In spite of all of this, I do want to have kids one day...just maybe when I'm 31 or 32 or we've figured out that independent wealth thing. I have faith that when it is time, my fears will get swallowed up by love and I'll know that motherhood is worth the risk.



Rachel Held Evans is an award-winning writer from Dayton, Tennessee – home of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. Her first book, *Evolving in Monkey Town*, was published by Zondervan last year. You can check out Rachel's blog at rachelheldevans.com and find a book trailer on YouTube (youtube.com/watch?v=TKxeM3uv0-s). Rachel is currently working on her new book: *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*.



Features

blog: (n) short for weblog, a website containing an online journal with reflections, comments and links. *Christian Courier* gives you a glimpse into contemporary Christian thinking by presenting excerpts from some of today's top blogs. Blogs are usually free-association, occasional, off-the-cuff and may not conform to the standards of print publications.



shauna.

Shauna Niequist (shaunaniequist.com) is an emerging author on the contemporary Christian literature scene. She has written two books already, and a third, *Bread & Wine*, is in the works. She is a captivating writer. Her voice is warm, funny and honest. Women especially will enjoy her reflections on weight and self-esteem issues, hosting parties, shopping and parenting. There really isn't a topic that Shauna won't tackle...all from an earnest and evident desire to live within the calling and shelter of a present God.

Here's a brief introduction from her blog: *Shauna Niequist grew up in Barrington, Illinois and then studied English and French Literature at Westmont College in Santa Barbara. After graduation, she worked with high school students at Willow Creek in Barrington for five years. On her first day there, she met Aaron Niequist, and three years later they were married.*

They moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to work at Mars Hill. They made great friends, walked to the Real Food Café twice a week for breakfast, and learned the hard way that they are not home repair people. Their son Henry was born there, and will be four this fall.

After six years in Grand Rapids, they moved back to the Chicago area. Aaron is a worship leader at Willow Creek, and Shauna is theoretically working on another book, but mostly playing with Henry and planning dinner party menus.

Enough

Wednesday, January 12, 2011

Something extraordinary happened to me today.

I found out a dear friend is pregnant. That's not extraordinary. Everyone I know is pregnant. You think I'm exaggerating, but I have 17 pregnant friends, and 9 friends with babies born since September. Not just Facebook friends or acquaintances, either – real *see-them-at-church, go-to-their-showers, send-them-baby-blankets* friends.

It's an epidemic, and I sometimes think I might be at the center of it – like if you're my friend, you're 883,584 times more likely to get pregnant than if you're not. I'm like an incredibly successful fertility drug. My friend Kelly used to say that if you want to get married, you should be his roommate, because for a couple years everyone who moved in with him promptly met someone, fell in love, moved out, and got married. That's how I am with pregnancies, I think. Trying to conceive? I'm your ticket. It works for you...but it doesn't seem to be working for me.

Henry will be five this year, and since his first birthday, we've been trying to have another baby: seeing doctors, praying, longing. I've miscarried twice. After miscarrying twins last February I took a time out to train for the marathon, knowing on some sludgy, inarticulate level that I couldn't try any more for a while, that my heart couldn't bear any more.

The marathon was several months ago. Nothing to report. And in the meantime, approximately every woman I know between twenty and forty has announced a pregnancy.

At one point this winter I was feeling so tender and raw about it that at dinner with my family, I said, "If any of you are pregnant, I just need you to tell me now." I said this to my almost 60-year-old parents and my single brother. They stared at me with confusion, but at that point, nothing would have surprised me. My phone's probably pregnant. That chair over there probably just got pregnant without even trying.

Clearly, I was not handling this well. At one point, I told Aaron: *pregnant is the new skinny*. What I meant is this: if you know me at all, you know that one of my most cracked-up terribly errant beliefs is that skinny people are always happy. Because I think I would be happy all day long if I was skinny. If something upset me, I would just look down at my long, skinny legs – happiness! If my heart was broken, I'd just put on a bikini and that sadness would vanish.

Listen, I know this isn't true. I know this is crazy talk. I know miserable skinny people. But I confess that sometimes I want to shake them: I know, I know, this or that has got you down, but find a three-way mirror and look at your butt. Don't you feel better now? I know I would.

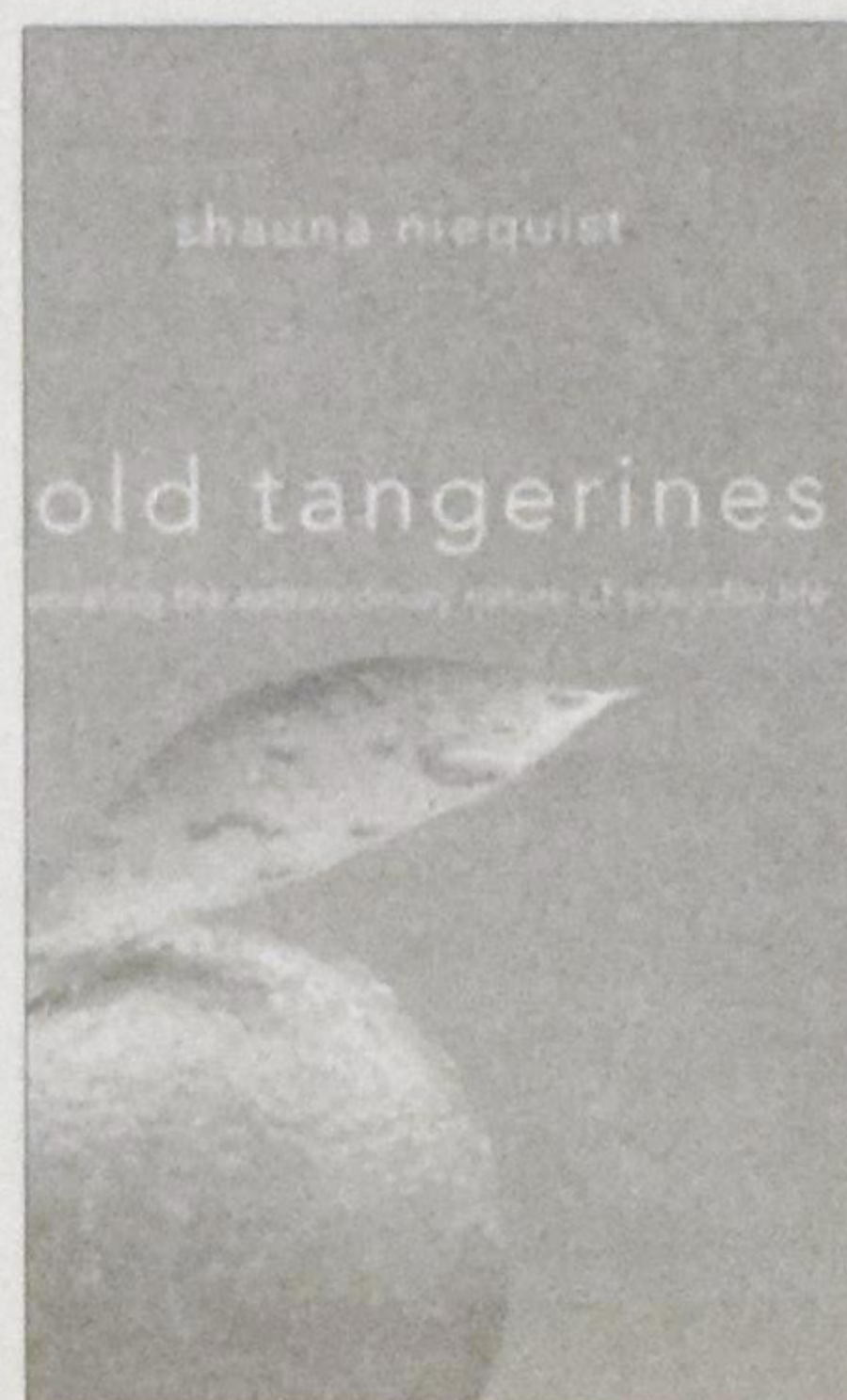
I found myself believing the same thing about being pregnant – that all my left-out, broken-down, fragile, ugly feelings would vanish the second I saw the magical line on the test. I know it's not true, but I felt it.

I became the person that people don't want to tell. I hate that. A friend told me her happy, fantastic news, and just a second later she burst out crying, afraid for how this would make me feel. I hate that. I work really hard to arrange my face in such a way that approximates uncomplicated glee. And I am happy for them, of course. But sometimes just after the happiness is the desperation. Some days are easier than others.

At one point I told Aaron that if I found out I wasn't pregnant that month, I'd break something glass, just to feel it shatter. I was counting the days all the time, recounting, hoping.

And then I found out that I wasn't pregnant. Again. I didn't break anything, but it seems that something broke inside me. Something cracked and all the energy and fear and roiling anger drained out. I felt calm and empty. I felt sad but not devastated. I began to think about it in terms of a year, about wanting to have a baby this year, and less about this month! This month! This month.

I was exhausted, and I couldn't carry it anymore. *Enough. Enough.*



It had reached fever pitch – consuming, obsessive, frantic. Unsustainable. It was like an addiction and that moment was like getting sober: raw, silent, clear-eyed, the absolute stillness after a storm. It felt like praying.

This morning, when I heard the news about my friend, I felt what I've wanted to feel all along but couldn't locate: uncomplicated and deep happiness. I felt happy for her. Very, very happy. And I feel so thankful for that feeling, for being able to be uncomplicatedly happy for the people I love.

It could all change again next month – I know that. I've been around this block for years now: easier and harder, more complicated and less. I'm all serene and happy right now but I could be back to throwing glassware next month. This morning, though, I'll take what I can get.

The word that came to my mind this morning was *ENOUGH*.

Enough: I don't want to live like that anymore. And *enough:* I have *enough*. I have more than I need, more than I could ask for. I have a son who delights me every single day. A husband I adore. A family that walks with me well and friends that make the world feel rich. I do work I care about – no small thing.

It's not wrong to want another baby...but there's a fine line in there, and I feel I've crossed it a few times this winter, and crossed over into that terrible territory where you can't be happy unless you have just that thing you want, no matter what else you have. Speaking of children, that's how they are – demanding, myopic, only able to focus on what they need in that moment. That's not how I want to live. That's not who I want to be.

I want to cultivate a deep sense of gratitude, of groundedness, of *enough*, even while I'm longing for something more. The longing and the gratitude, both. I'm practicing believing that God knows more than I know, that he sees what I can't, that he's weaving a future I can't even imagine from where I sit this morning.

Extraordinary, indeed.

More than enough.

Necessary endings

Sunday, August 14, 2011

Today **Henry Cloud** spoke at our church, and his message really, really connected with me.

During the service, I texted a friend to tell her that Henry's words reminded me of a conversation we'd had earlier in the week that I'd love to continue. I sent an email to another friend in a totally different life stage to make sure she would have a chance to listen to the teaching, too.

Henry's most recent book is called *Necessary Endings*, and I'm looking forward to reading it this week. One of his key questions today was, "What's present in your life today that's not in line with what you want for your tomorrow?"

I know (well, as much as anyone ever does) what the immediate future will hold, and I'm so incredibly excited about that – I adored the newborn season with our son Henry. I can't wait to rock and nurse and snuggle. And I know what will happen a little after that...I'll finish *Bread & Wine*, a book I've been excited about for a long time.

But then what? I have no idea. Another book? Another child? A dream I haven't even started dreaming yet? Will my life look mostly the same or completely different a year from now?

I don't know, and I certainly don't need to know now, but Henry's question framed things in a really important way for me right now.

How would you answer his question?

"What's present in your life today that's not in line with what you want for your tomorrow?"

Is there a relationship that needs to end?

A job that's long since stopped being a good fit?

A lifestyle or habit or practice that worked for a season but doesn't work now?

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



A sermon I heard recently made me sigh in exasperation, and that begat anger; righteous anger, I believe. The Lutheran pastor hijacked the Gospel lesson – “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church” – in order to become topical. This pastor used to know better. At his advanced age does he feel the need to be more “relevant?”

The pastor wanted to tell us about the meeting of church leaders he attended. Those clergy decided it would be great if we Christians were to initiate a “dialogue” with the growing number of Muslims in the area. There have been similar proposals from some Christian Reformed leaders.

Muslims are not monsters, the pastor said. And Christians should never react to them in violence (but of course!). And talking about being sinners in need of forgiveness wouldn’t be a good place to start. I inferred that he thinks it would cause offense. But he admitted he has “no clue” how this “dialogue” might take place.

The ultimate love for our neighbour

I’m all for talking over differences – between spouses, friends, families, neighbours, nations. It is precisely sin that makes that frequently necessary. But when it comes to being a Christian witness to those who do not confess, and who shrug off or deny, that Christ is the Saviour of the world, our first *duty* as disciples – commanded by Christ himself – is to preach this Good News to the lost.

That is the ultimate sign of love for our neighbor as ourselves, including our Muslim neighbour. Such “preaching” can take many forms. We must be Christ’s witnesses through our daily actions and interactions. We readily admit that the secularists, atheists, practical atheists and other false religionists we encounter all around us need to hear the Gospel, repent and be baptized, don’t we? Is it fair to exclude Muslims from hearing the Good News?

All false religions and false gods enslave. Islam has no notion of forgiveness or the God who is love, who demonstrates this love so profoundly that he sent his Son to be God-man among us to die in our place and reconcile us to himself. Ask any of the thousands of former Muslims worldwide who now embrace Christ how enslaved they were, and how *good* the Good News became for them! It is *so* good that they are willing to follow Jesus despite great peril and possible death, even from their families.

The intent of the suggested contact with Muslims seemingly is not to be ambassadors for Christ. It would be an exercise in discovering points of mutual admiration, a kind of socio-pseudo-religious “you show me yours and I’ll show you mine.” Don’t misunderstand. Of course I’m not against talking with people of other religions and attempting to better understand what they believe. But the harvest is full and the labourers are few, says Jesus. We *must* expose

What does it mean to love my (Muslim) neighbour?

our Muslim neighbours to the truth of Christ’s Gospel and not simply “dialogue” in the hope of eliciting among us Christians warm fuzzy feelings in the name of enlightened ecumenicity and comparative religion.

Christ will enable us

Bringing the Gospel to Muslims is admittedly tricky. But it’s also difficult to get the Message to hardcore agnostics and practical atheists. They will know us by the Spirit’s fruit in us. And all things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.

Inter-religious “dialogue” presumes equal partners, so it must be assumed that Christ – who proclaims himself *the Way, the Truth, the Life* – has no greater corner on truth than Mohammed. This puts us Christians in an untenable position. But the sermon I heard was preached in the context of a denomination in which most national leaders no longer believe that God’s Word is God’s Word and that Christ is the only Salvation of the fallen human race. The pastor hasn’t himself rejected these truths, but it is hard not to be influenced by the modern ethos of one’s church, which in the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is increasingly antithetical to the Gospel.

Thus my reaction. But even justifiable anger shouldn’t be prolonged. What can and should be continual, however, and the only real antidote to unbelief (ours and others’), is immersing

“Dialogue” isn’t enough, loving our Muslim neighbours means sharing the truth of the Gospel.

ourselves in Scripture and in prayer so that we are constantly communing with the triune God of heaven and earth, the better to do his will. Do we understand why St. Paul admonishes us to “pray without ceasing”?

As for Scripture: “Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). What a startling image! Mendelssohn astutely uses it in an aria in *Elijah*, at the end of Elijah’s confrontation with the false prophets of Baal. It should leave us in no doubt that God is in control of all things and accomplishes all he wishes, in the way he wishes. Yet in his mercy he listens to our prayers for ourselves and the world.

If such prayer fills our hearts and we are equipped with such a Word, we will pass it on to *all* our neighbours and swell the ranks of those “few labourers” harvesting Christ’s vineyard. And our reward, when we meet him, will be his exhilarating words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.

Artful Eye



MARIANNE VANDERSPEK

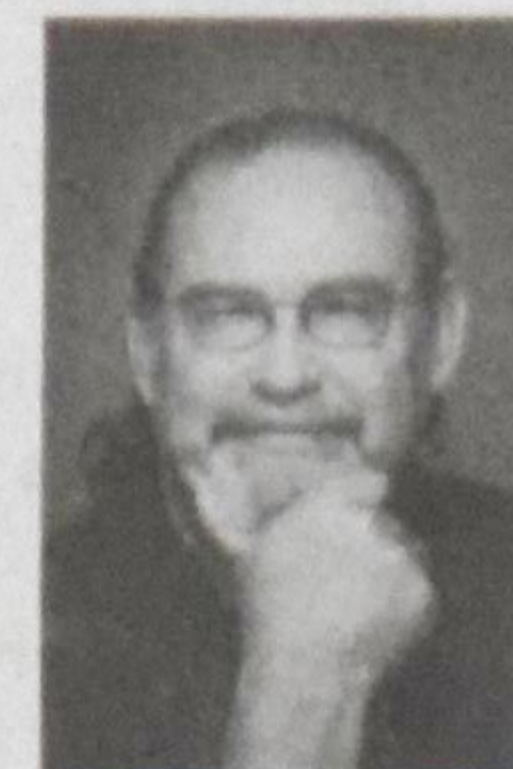


Marianne is a photographer and farmer who lives near Florence, ON. She attends Dresden CRC.

Fire of stars

It is well before the dawn and the moon,
long ago, slip slid quietly away,
leaving glowering stars barely winking
behind the black rage of thunder head clouds.
In the great beyond, these stars, fuming fuel,
burn brilliant, lighting up their galaxies,
but here, among these planets we call home,
they seem benign, harmless, and far away.
Light years of distance separate us all,
so we do not feel their awful burning,
nor their bright day warmth. Not good or evil,
they are small white blinks in a midnight sky.
Here beneath, we wrestle with ramping clouds,
though rainbows promise there will be no flood,
no catastrophic downpour cascading
over all we know. No endless floating
on wooden rafts till all is drowned and dead.
Still, we only see this closer danger.
We study clouds, ignore the falling stars.
Cataclysmic infernos surely come.
All will burn to nothing in white hot flame.
On that great day, only what lasts remains.
So why do we fear the dark’ning storm clouds,
when it is collapsing stars that kill us?

Rod Hugen



Rod Hugen (thevillageparson@crchurches.net) is a pastor at The Village and also a church planter working for Classis Arizona (CRC).

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



The mystic in the Dutch library



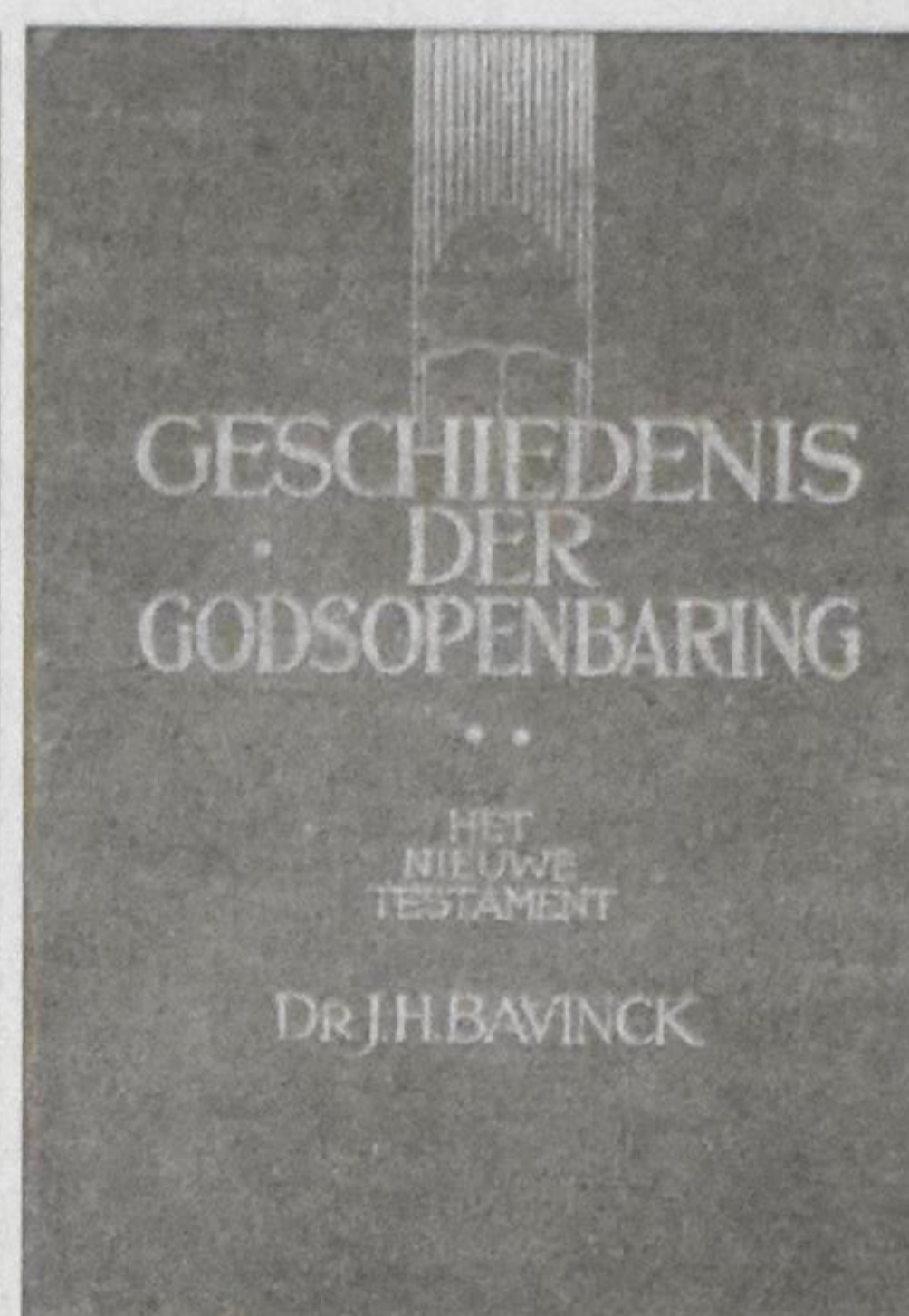
I'm the bulletin editor at our church. I do my job every Thursday in our Dutch Library, running off 150 bulletins, 116 inserts for the mail slots, and 40 children's bulletins. Yes, believe it or not, we still have a Dutch Library. And it's used regularly! There are a few faithful seniors (mostly women) who borrow the (mostly romantic) books with their 1950s covers depicting glamorous young ladies who are in dire need of some sincere Christian gentlemen to rescue them. There are no cards to sign out the books, and no one is keeping track. To be fair, there are also a large number of seriously weighty Dutch theological books, unremarkably bound with plain, boring covers.

These are some other things in the Dutch Library:

1. the photocopier and paper cutter, which I use for the bulletins
2. stacked boxes of paper
3. a stretcher and trauma kit
4. a portable pulpit
5. ropes to block off the back pews during the afternoon service (the non-conformists and rebellious just unclip them and sit where they want anyway)
6. a TV/DVD stand for catechism (we still use Lew Vander Meer's videos on the Belgic Confession from Faith Alive)
7. extra tables
8. a shelf with office supplies and Bibles and Blue Psalter Hymnals
9. a blackboard covered with four Vacation Bible School posters portraying the story of Peter walking on the waves toward a charismatic Jesus who is flashing an astonishingly white smile. The last poster shows Peter also smiling



Readers' dilemma: Dutch romance or Dutch theology?



broadly. This is the moment when Jesus rescues him, and Peter is feeling very relieved. The posters are from Gospel Light, a betrayal of Faith Alive that causes a ripple of unease to reach the beachhead of my denominational loyalty.

Sometimes I read the Bible while I wait for the bulletins to be copied, but mostly I pray.

Ten identical worksheets are taped to the wall, each of which says "Prayer: no worries" and has an illustration of a kneeling woman lifting up her hands in prayer. The GEMS have written Philippians 4:6 on their papers: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Allison's worksheet stands out. She has used glittery markers to add some freehand special effects: a bouncy yellow ponytail to the head of her kneeling woman and a yellow sun, partly hidden behind a blue cloud, with the requisite traditional rays streaming down.

That Philippians 4:6 is a tough verse for me. I am anxious far more often than not. Worry is a strong contender for my besetting sin. (Those of you who know me can probably cite a few others, but let's not go there). Maybe that's why there are ten sheets with the same message lined up on the wall where I do the bulletin every week! Allison's drawing reminds me that whether it's sunny or cloudy or somewhere in between, I can pray to relieve my worries. Last Thursday I prayed for my family. I prayed for my church and for the people listed on the bulletin. I prayed for several online friends, asking the Lord to prosper their ministries and their outreach endeavours. I prayed for those who are burdened with disquieting personal struggles. I prayed for one who is dying.

It's my kind of mystical. Saint Allison prophesying from a worksheet in a tacky Dutch library. Blessed are the fainthearted, the anxious, all you worriers who need daily reminders that God rules in the heavens. Blessed are you when you present your requests to him who controls the weather and your life. Blessed are you when you consider the rich heritage of belief and faith you've received from the wayfarers who've gone before. Blessed are you in those visionary moments when the Son's rays illumine the far-flung network of believers to which you belong – at home, online, at Faith Alive and even at Gospel Light! Be thankful! Be brave!

My wavering faith is pulled from the billows. Whenever, like Peter, I flounder, which is far too often, Jesus reaches out, smiles, and says, "I'm right here." Even in the Dutch library. He never tires of rescuing me. ✕

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.

Getting Unstuck



Arlene Van Hove



This is what I get in return for my 30 years of service for my company?

Did I do something wrong?

I just...I guess... you leave me dumb-founded. I do not know where this is coming from?

I have heard that losing your job is like a death in a family. But personally, it feels more like the people I worked with were my family – and I died.

The above painful responses to losing one's job are excerpts from the film *Up in the Air*.

Unfortunately, they recently became poignant and real for various lower mainland British Columbia Christian school teachers. Some of the teachers who were let go from their positions had anywhere from 10 to over 30 years teaching experience. They were dedicated Christian teachers who taught my children and more recently my grandchildren.

For most of us, suddenly losing our job is like having the rug pulled from under us. We completely lose our balance. The life we've known suddenly evaporates and we don't know what to do, how to act or where to start. Our sense of powerlessness is so overwhelming that it shatters our assumptions about ourselves and the community at large.

ing change

Losses I've just mentioned were the result of "conditions" when two schools, an elementary and

Adjusting isn't easy

a high school, were being amalgamated for a more effective and communal future. This ambitious and complex project is still in process, but mistakes have certainly been made. Since I am not involved but simply a bewildered member of the community, I want to say that here too we are in good company. Which brings me to John P. Kotter.

John P. Kotter, professor at Harvard and author of *Leading Change*, believes major change is sometimes necessary to bring organizations into the 21st century. But he finds that in many situations the improvements are disappointing and the carnage is appalling with wasted resources and burned out, scared or frustrated employees. While Kotter admits that pain will be present to some degree whenever human communities are forced to adjust to shifting conditions, he stresses that a significant amount of waste and anguish is avoidable.

How? Kotter lists eight common errors leaders of change make and gives practical suggestions on how to move more effectively through the change. Most importantly, he stresses the need for developing a vision for change and communicating this vision effectively. This includes transparency throughout the process. Without a vision to guide decision making each and every choice can generate heated conflicts that sap energy and destroy morale. A sense of direction is crucial. Moreover, communicating the vision comes in words and in deeds, the latter being the most powerful.



This picture of the author's granddaughter at her grade eight graduation demonstrates the growing diversity in Christian schools.

A word of appreciation

My spouse and I have been involved with our Christian schools for close to 30 years. Now our grandchildren are attending the schools their parents (our children) did so long ago. Some of the teachers who were let go were a significant part of building the school during the last decade or two. Last June, during the grade eight graduation exercises I snapped a photo of our granddaughter surrounded by fellow grade eight classmates. And I marvel. The diversity in the student body today brings tears to my eyes and joy to my soul. There is no doubt in my mind the school has been richly blessed during the last few decades. As for now, if the leaders can make room for healing in their vision for change, renewed trust would abound and grace would surely help us move in a direction that reflects our faith and our best values. ✕

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema



Not a recession, but a resetting?



It's been a crazy summer in our world today, the exception being right here where I live. Our garden had its rains in time and our three apple trees were loaded with fruit: an early one with a deli-

cious species, good for eating and processing, a later one to provide us with "an (organic) apple per day to keep the doctor away," and even my Northern Spy variety had a few dozen. A friend gave me a different kind of raspberries, which bore abundantly, so we ate hundreds of them and froze even more; also carrots galore, and red beets, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages and kale, of course. Each day we thank the Lord for his bounties.

However, these ideal conditions did not extend to the economy. Last month *The Wall Street Journal* reported that "Forty years ago today, US President Richard Nixon closed the gold window and ushered in, for the first time in human history, a global system of unconstrained paper money under full control of the state."

Four decades later this is no longer true. Yes, there still is an unconstrained supply of money, but Germany, France and the USA have lost control over the Euro and the dollar, and are trying, in vain, to regain that authority. Gold has gone hyperbolic.

It's a crazy world out there. I wonder how many of the devout Christians who back the Republican Party, for example, realize that its current approach to social welfare issues is identical to the one presented by Anton Szandor LaVey in *The Satanic Bible*, which advocates radical self interest and a "might makes right" approach to finance. It may seem odd that believers in a faith where Christ told one of his followers to give all he had to the poor, now by and large support a party that's telling America to give all it has to the rich. That's what you get when most people who claim they believe in the Bible have never actually read more than a verse here and there.

By the time you read this column, U.S. President Barack Obama will have given an important speech on the economy. Just as the Canadian Finance Minister talked about rekindling economic growth, so, I am sure, the US president will sing that same tune: that's the only song politicians know. The false note in all this is that perpetual growth is impossible. Yet this faith persists because people in general are deaf to any truth that will harm their political or financial fortune or religious comfort.

The coming era

All signs point to the dawning of a new era, one of "no growth" which also might spell the end of The Age of Money. But nobody is admitting this. Already perilous instability is the norm, with the market up and down like a yoyo and gold soaring.

Greed is the cause. The Bible tells us that greed is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). In my youth there was a song that went "Money is the root of all evil ... take it away." That's exactly what's happening. Money is melting away like the Arctic. Each time a home owner goes bankrupt (there are millions of households with mortgages larger than their value) money evaporates, vanishes like a puff of smoke. Bank shares in the US and Europe have dropped by more than 80 percent in the last few years. This plummeting represents the dwindling into nothingness of the so-called fiat money created when Nixon went off the gold standard. Now all those virtual money entries, fashioned by a flick of the finger on a computer screen, are being deleted. The current financial system needs growth, and without economic growth it will collapse from debt defaults.



German children play with stacks of money during the 1920s, when hyperinflation rendered paper money worthless. Could this happen again?

I believe what we are facing is not another economic recession, but a resetting of the economy. Just as in a few weeks we will reset the clock to Daylight Saving Time, in the next few years the economy will re-set itself. Too long we have been in an overdraft position, both environmentally and economically. It's payback time, both principal and interest. This means that we will be subjected to the most drastic adjustment humanity has ever faced. Brace yourself for bad times. ➤

Bert Hielema, as a commercial real estate appraiser, wrote long narrative valuation reports which always included a section on future economic conditions. His territory covered an area from Picton to the Algonquin, from Peterborough to Perth.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



I have had several emails from those who read my last column ("Born this way?" CC August 22, 2011), and I want to thank all my readers for taking the time to consider the words that I put together. This column dealt with social issues, focusing primarily on same gender attraction and the church.

To some, this issue may be something we "just don't talk about," while to others there may be an attitude of "what's the big deal, it really isn't much different than someone dealing with heterosexual lust issues." I believe that our gender and sexual identities are very important not just for us, but to God and how he designed us. Culturally speaking, we live in a hostile climate.

Have Christian ideas about sex and gender become too fuzzy?

My mom, who has spoken alongside my wife and I in various settings, states that there is a "climate change" that is happening – and she's not talking about the environment. Rather, she's talking about a change in how the church and society views gender and identity. Some church communities are slowly becoming an affirming place for those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered, and by doing so are encouraging these people to continue walking in their broken state rather than offering the hope of restoration through Jesus Christ.

Gender and sexual identities are important. I believe that God formed us and made us male and female, and that he created us to be this way for a reason. Specifically, he did this so that we could bear his image to the world around us as we walk in whole and holy relationships with the opposite sex. What we are seeing is a distortion of gender, a confusion regarding sexual identity and the embracing of a fallen, broken state. The enemy of God loves this. The enemy of God (Satan, Devil or whatever name you call him), wants to wipe God off the face of the earth. He will do whatever he can to accomplish this. This is a bold claim, but I believe that one of the last frontiers that the enemy has is our gender and our sexuality. Abortion has been going on for years, killing innocent babies. Babies that God knew, created and had plans for. The enemy continues to have his hand in the whole area of abortion, but that isn't enough. If he can distort the image of God in any way, then he has done his job.

Gender and sexuality revisited

Someone who read my last column asked me "Really, what is so different about same gender strugglers?" For myself, I came to the place of realizing that my unwanted same sex attraction was no different than a heterosexual man dealing with lust (other than the object of our lust). The root issues for me were very similar. I struggled with shame, insecurity, low self-esteem, control and anger.

When these core issues were triggered it caused me to seek comfort in the arms of another man. Often when these core issues are triggered for a heterosexual man dealing with sexual addiction, it causes them to seek comfort in the arms of a woman.

It's important to realize though that those who struggle with unwanted same sex attraction come from varied backgrounds and experiences, and that the issue

is very complex. It isn't just a pat answer that will help the struggler. The person who struggles has often spent years in silence, often fearing a negative response from those in their community, specifically within the body of Christ. How we respond and how we love is very important to those who struggle with gender and sexual identity issues. If what I believe is true regarding the enemy destroying God's image by distorting gender, then the body of Christ needs to rise to be a different voice, a voice of hope and restoration. It needs to rise to its place as a community of grace and truth. Affirming and bringing people into the healing presence of Jesus Christ is crucial. Loving people and being truthful about our own broken places will hopefully allow others to realize that the body of Christ is a safe place to seek out the restoration of God's intended purpose for our gender and sexual identities. This is a huge issue we are facing. One that won't "just go away," but is at the very heart of a God whose image depends on how we walk out our gender and sexuality. ➤

Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

Feature

Doing development differently

Matt Helleman

Growing up, I learned about international development from the work of my family. My uncle and aunt, Adrian and Wendy Helleman, were missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions, working in the Philippines, Russia and Nigeria, teaching philosophy and theology to the next generation of local thought leaders.

Later, my own parents, Hans and Henni Helleman, became International Relief Managers with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. In Malawi, Kenya, Burma and Indonesia, they helped local communities respond to earthquakes and drought, plan for sustainable agriculture and build earthquake-proof homes.

From these examples, I learned the values and importance of caring for our neighbours in other parts of the world, sharing our knowledge and experience and learning from their values and experience. I also learned the importance of integrating my faith in the work of development, allowing others to see the love of Jesus through the work of my hands and the love in my heart.

I, too, have followed my family's example in supporting international development. But I have taken a different path. Rather than a large organization focused on many different areas and tasks (such as the one I worked at for several years), I have come now to



Sauti Moja helps Maasai women gain access to resources such as land and livestock.

focus my efforts on a small organization called Sauti Moja that is intimately involved in the lives of small Maasai communities in Tanzania and Kenya.

The benefit of focusing on such a comparatively small area, where no other organization is working, is that we have been able to initiate programming in direct response to needs identified by locals who want to help their communities. We are also able to deliver programming with almost no overhead, ensuring that the donor dollars we receive are spent almost entirely on the ground in Maasai communities.

provide food and income. Beneficiaries are involved in selecting their own animals, often from their own community, which allows wealth to be redistributed in the community without putting a strain on resources to care for additional livestock. Then the first female offspring of the animals are passed on to the next most-needy widows.

Another very vulnerable group is child mothers. These school-age children, who are often pressured through poverty and low education into sexual relationships, are excluded from public education when they become pregnant. The child mothers program welcomes them into a Hope for Girls Centre, where they are given support for a healthy pregnancy and a scholarship to private school. The program also focuses on educating families about girls' rights, and educating girls about reproductive health.

1000 Widows project

Because the Maasai are pastoral, access to land and livestock is immensely important. Unfortunately, many vulnerable women – widows and abandoned wives – do not have access to these resources. Our 1000 Widows project offers vulnerable women a female donkey to carry water and four female goats to

Africa, the Maasai have been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. "Community conversations" have allowed Maasai communities to come together in support of those affected, while also identifying ways to counter the pandemic. We have seen great progress – in fact, while these communities were previously hostile to those who have AIDS, men and women are now able to publicly identify themselves as HIV positive, form a support group and counsel those who have recently fallen ill with the disease.

In these and other programs, Sauti Moja works to fulfill the Biblical mandate as expressed in Isaiah 1:17, "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

We may not have the resources or the reach of organizations like CRWM and CRWRC, but our work serves as a complement to their larger missions, engaging intimately in the lives of the Maasai communities that would be otherwise overlooked by our busy, developed, consumerist, Western world.

We all dream of changing the world. But many of us get overwhelmed at the enormity of the task. By being involved with Sauti Moja, I feel like I'm contributing in a meaningful and manageable way. It's direct and I know my support is going straight to those who need it most. And as I get to know those who carry out and plan the work and who have dedicated themselves to this labour of love, all on a volunteer basis, I become more and more inspired to help and serve.

To learn more about our work, go to sautimoja.org.

Matt Helleman is a stay-at-home dad to 11-month-old Mira and a board member of Sauti Moja.



Goat project for benefit of the Maasai women in the Mangae village.



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2		6		8			1	4
			9		5	6		2
			2			1		
7	9							

Classifieds

Births



Announcing **Kasher Jude Wierenga**
Born July 25, 2011, 8 lbs, 14 oz, 21.5"
parents Emily and Trenton Wierenga.
Shown here with brother Aiden.

Address: Box 72, Neerlandia AB T0G 1R0



With thankfulness to the Lord, we welcome
Benjamin Micah Bick, 8 lbs, 10 oz, 21.5"
Born September 2, 2011 to
parents Allan and Angela Reitsma Bick
A brother to Robin and Alba.

Address: 35 Mowat Crescent
Barrie ON L4N 5B4

Obituaries

JANE ("Jennet") H. LOCK, (nee Nagel)

of Edmonton, AB was taken Home
by her Lord and Saviour on June 3, 2011, at age 49.

She was the loving wife of Jurjen K. Lock and is survived by the children she cherished: Evan, Emilie, Jeremy and Carl. Along with her Lord, it was her family that was always most precious to her.

Jennet was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario where she attended Toronto District Christian High School while attending Willowdale Christian Reformed Church. She went to Calvin College and graduated from York University. Her death came somewhat unexpectedly after a lifelong struggle with depression which intensified over the past couple years.

Although we grieve, we have great joy for we know that precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of those faithful to him. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Write the Lock family at: 14303 106 A Avenue, Edmonton AB T5N 1E3.

**SHIRLEY FLUIT (Sjoukje Wiersma)**

March 7, 1920 (Ommen, Netherlands)
August 30, 2011 (Grimsby, Ontario, Canada)

Our dear mother entered into the presence of her Lord on August 30, 2011 at McNally House in Grimsby, Ontario at the age of 91. She was a loving wife and companion of Ralph for 50 years (died 1994).

Beloved mother to:

Hilbert & Jeanette, Ancaster, Ontario
Bernie & Linda DeJonge (Menno died 1994), Kitchener, Ont.
Ralph & Erna, Grimsby, Ontario
Andy & Rita, Grimsby, Ontario
Alice & Peter VanDyken, Cambridge, Ontario
Charlie & Flory, Mt. Hope, Ontario

She will be sadly missed by all her many grandchildren & great-grandchildren. She is survived by her brother Minne Wiersma in the Netherlands and sister-in-law Tina Batterink of Grimsby.

A service in celebration of her life and God's faithfulness took place on Saturday, September 3 at Mt. Hamilton CRC, Hamilton, Ontario.

Correspondence may be sent to Ralph Fluit, 113 Leitch Drive Grimsby ON L3M 2T9

*I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.*
Psalm 121

Anniversaries

With joy and thanksgiving to God,
we celebrate the **50th Anniversary**
of our parents and grandparents

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October 6, 2011.

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Grandma & Grandpa!

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Art & Marsha Brouwer

Angela and Philip, Joel, Allison, Michael and Sarah

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Bertina & Eric Hogeterp

Joey, Corey and Caleb

Irene & Jeff Janssen

Rebecca, Rachel, Christopher and Eden

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Chatham ON N7L 5K1

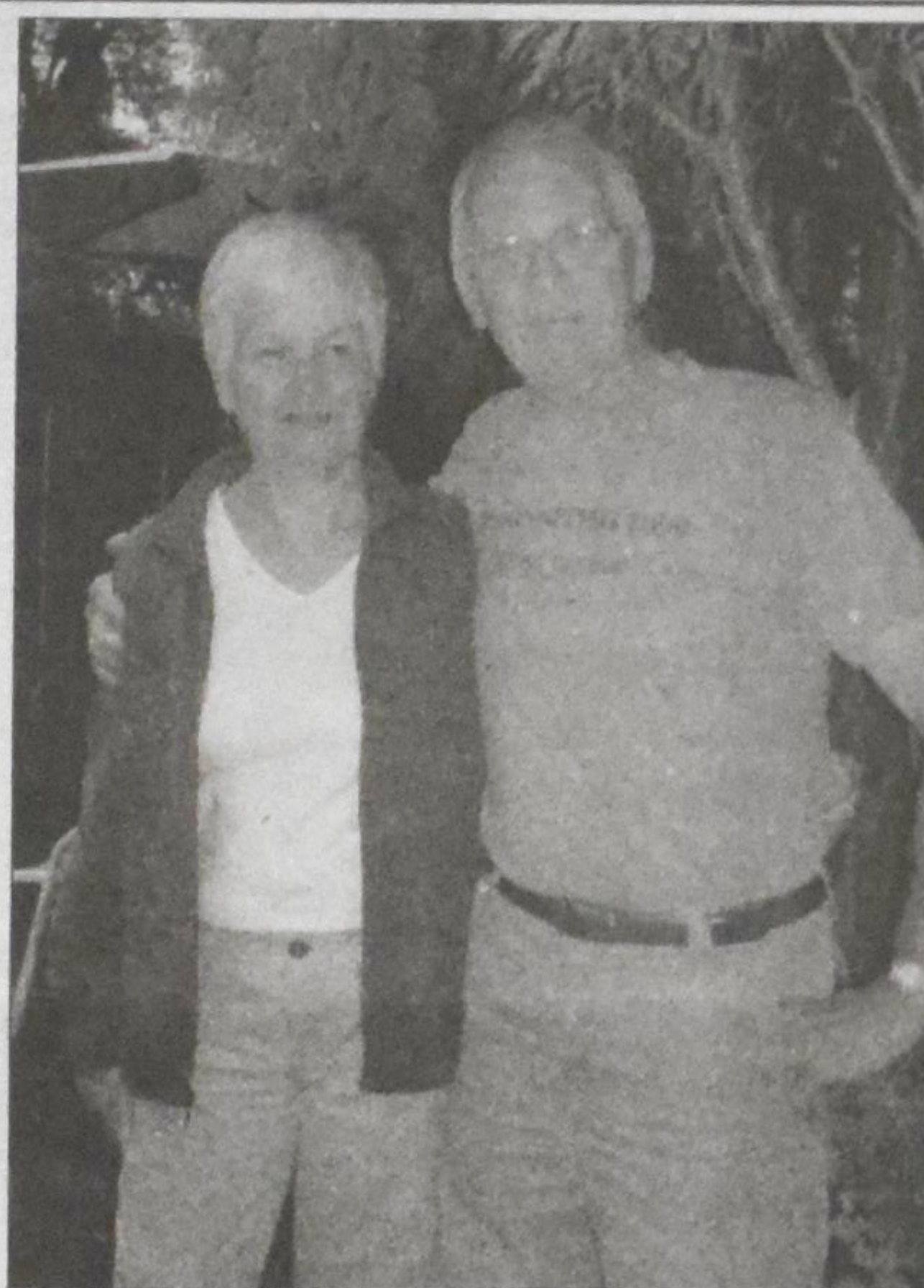
The children and grandchildren of

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were privileged last month
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to mark the day, August 25, 1961
when they were wed
and to reflect on the half century since
and the legacies they have created.
We are grateful and extend our sincere thanks
to friends and family who came
from near and far to join the festivities.

Phil & Sue de Haan (Gina, Lee) *Grand Rapids, Mich.*
Joanne & Mark Abolt (Nick, Katie) *Grand Rapids, Mich.*
Derek & Lorissa de Haan (Jared, Mark) *London, Ont.*
Tessica de Haan (Ben, Hank, Luke) *London, Ont.*

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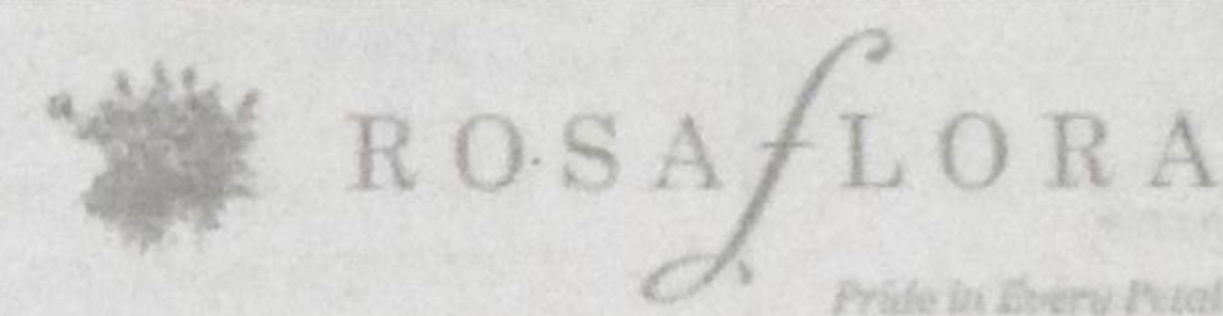
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Events/Advertising

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- Sep 25** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching. DVDs are available.
- Oct 1** Netherlands Bazaar, Thornhill Community Centre, See. ad below.
- Oct 15** Day of Encouragement. Hamilton District Christian High School, **Ancaster** For information, call: 905-336-0967 ext. 278 Information will soon be on our website: diaconalministries.com
- Nov 4** Christian Festival Concert. 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**, See ad.
- Nov 10** Annual Church & Charity Law Seminar. Hosted by Carters Professional Corporation in **Toronto**, Ontario. Details and online registration available at <http://charitylaw.ca>.
- Nov 20** CRC of **Stratford**, Ontario 60 year celebration. More information to come or at stratfordcrc.org



The Netherlands Bazaar on Saturday, October 1, 2011

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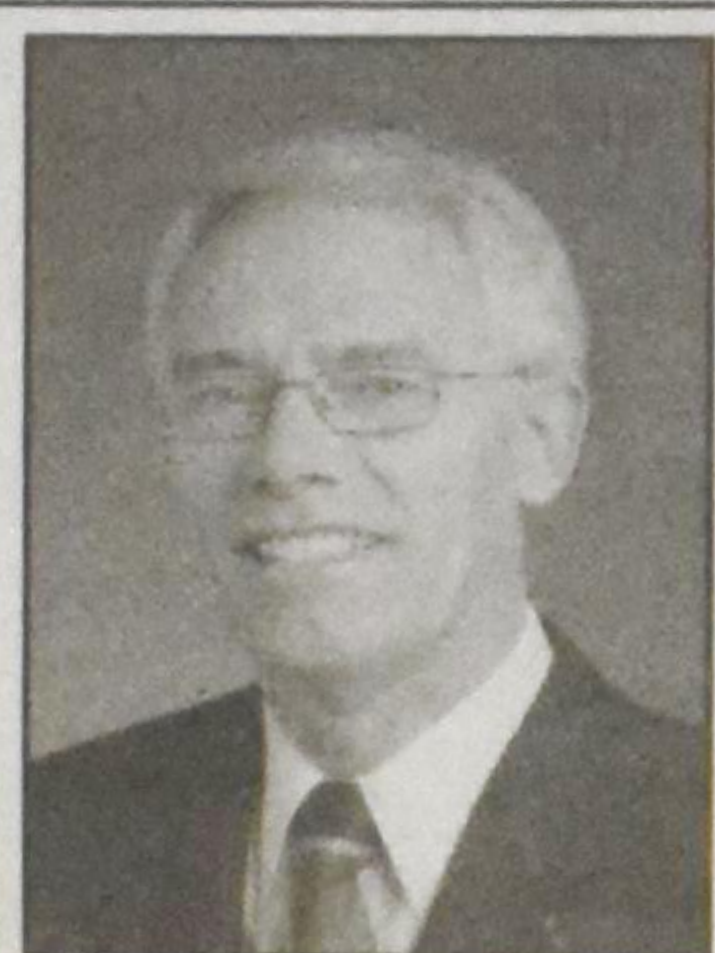
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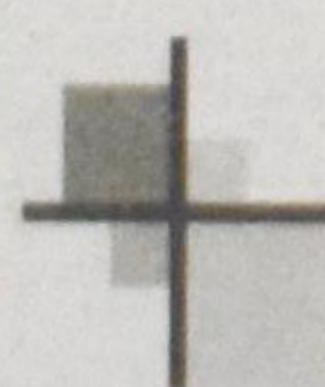
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News



Anarchy in the UK: rioters clash with police.



This picture from the Vancouver riots made the so-called "kissing couple" famous.

Understanding the riots in London and Vancouver

Chris Steenhof

On June 15, 2011, people around the world woke up to the shocking images of rioters on the streets of Vancouver burning police vehicles, looting department stores and smashing windows after the Vancouver Canucks lost in the deciding game of the Stanley Cup finals. Canadians, and people around the world, were left asking questions about how a riot like this was possible in a civilized and peaceful society.

Less than two months later, riots in London, England shook the world again. These riots were much more widespread, dangerous and complex than the Vancouver riots, and led to a collective sense of soul-

searching in the British media and on social networking sites. Many commentators tried to understand this violence in the proceeding weeks, offering sometimes vastly different explanations for the riots.

Possible Connections

The London and Vancouver riots were remarkably different events on several levels and any analysis of them must recognize the obvious differences between the two contexts. The Vancouver riot was a one-time occurrence surrounding a sporting event, exacerbated by a number of different factors, and was met with a measured, and arguably insufficient, response by political

and legal authorities. The London riots occurred over several days, involved a number of different cities, were triggered by a highly controversial police shooting, and were met by a very severe response from the British legal system.

But there are still important connections between the two events. For the Christian observer, it's important to begin with a biblical understanding of human beings and all aspects of human culture. All explanations of the riots, from David Cameron's declaration on the moral decline of society and the failure of parents, to social scientists' discussion of cultural and political factors, seek to address these basic worldview questions.

A proper understanding of the effects of sin, both on human beings and culture in general, can help Christians make sense of the riots. On a simplistic level, human beings are capable of evil and though we should be bothered by images of violence against people and property, they shouldn't surprise us. One of the teachers at the school where I teach asked students whether they might be capable of looting or destruction of property given the right circumstances. Many students raised their hands, indicating that they would.

But sin also affects the structures of human society, and this makes any analysis much more complicated. It's too easy to blame the riots on individual people acting sinfully when there are other more complex causes also involved. The choir of voices lamenting the failures of the family, the legal system and, in the case of the London riots, the inadequacy of the government's response to youth unemployment, is in many ways a critique of the unfettered optimism of secular humanism that has for so long dominated Western society.

Too much booze

While there are many other connections that can be made between the two riots, one that cannot be ignored is what both of these riots say about the place of alcohol in the larger society. The official Vancouver riot report, released earlier this month, places much of the blame on the level of alcohol consumption by the participants in the riot. In the Vancouver riots, police had banned the

sale of alcohol in the downtown core but this had only increased sales on the days leading up to the event. Many participants drank all day and then attended the events in the evening, and despite some police effort, consumed even more alcohol downtown. The central role of alcohol in the London riots has also been acknowledged by authorities in England. This reality, added to the many other negative effects of alcohol in society – spousal violence, impaired driving, and health consequences to name a few – should be of major concern to the Christian reader.

The choir of voices lamenting the failures of the family, the legal system and ... the inadequacy of the government's response to youth unemployment, is in many ways a critique of the unfettered optimism of secular humanism that has for so long dominated Western society.

How to respond?

How should we respond to these two events and other riots that may occur in the future? We can begin by committing ourselves to reflecting on the riots in the light of scripture. It's easy, and perhaps justified, to be angered by the actions of the rioters, but our response should perhaps be more measured and full of grace, acknowledging our own sinfulness.

We should also be committed to justice. The implications of this are beyond the scope of this article, but perhaps we can find a middle ground between the slow, seemingly sluggish workings of the Canadian legal system and the reactionary response of the British courts.

Finally, our response should be prayerful, acknowledging that ultimately it is God who is in control, and that we need His presence in our lives, and in our culture, if we are to truly understand and avoid events like the two riots we experienced this summer. ☞

Chris Steenhof is a teacher and principal living in beautiful Smithers, BC, with his wife and five children.



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